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KNAPP, CHARLES

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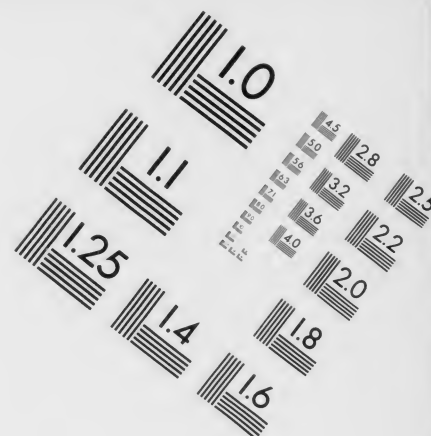
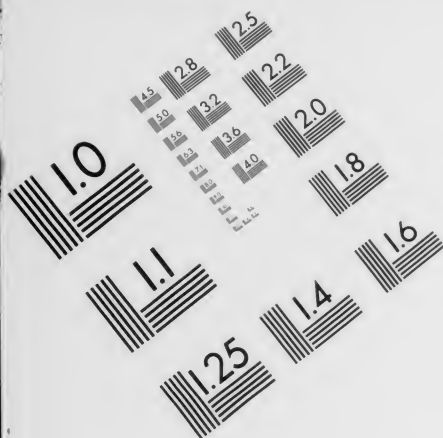
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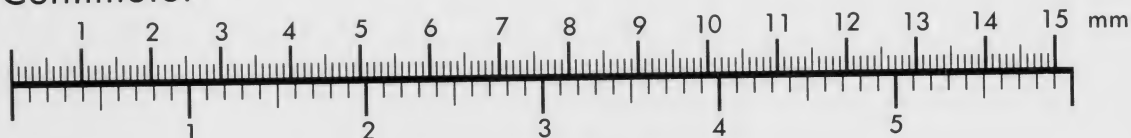
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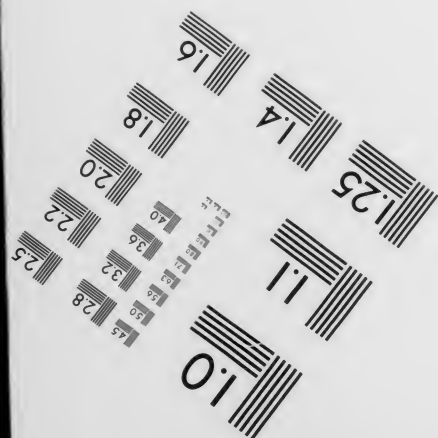
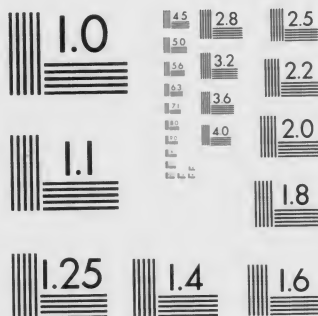
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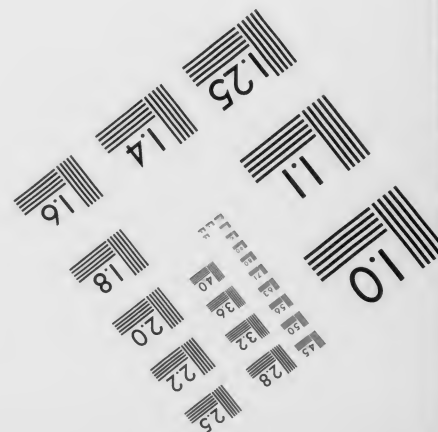
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THE ROMAN THEATER

CHARLES KNAPP

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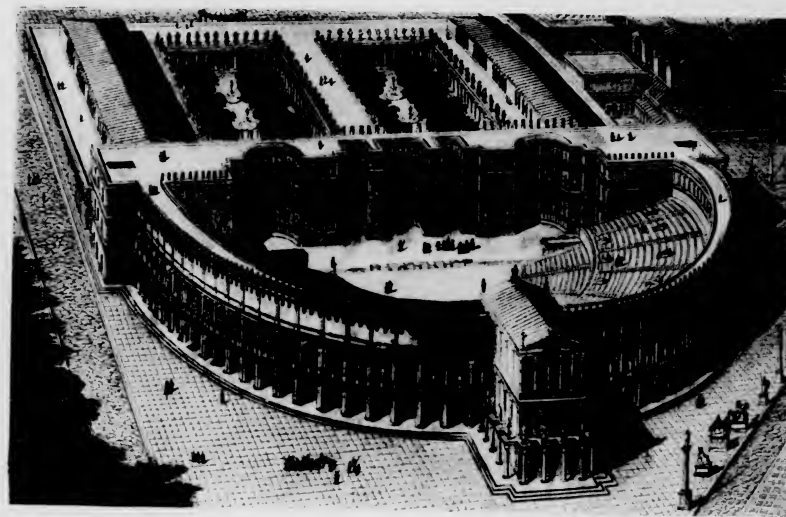
PLATE 1. THE GRAECO-ROMAN THEATER AT TAORMINA, SICILY, WITH VIEW OF SNOW-CLAD ETNA.

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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Design of Léveil based on Baltard.

FIG. 1. RECONSTRUCTION OF THEATER OF POMPEY IN ROME.

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IN ANCIENT Rome, under normal circumstances, it was possible to witness plays only at certain periods of the year, as an element in annually recurring festivals of the people. These festivals, known as *ludi*, came in April, July, September, and November. There were, however, extraordinary occasions on which plays might be seen. These were furnished by the dedication of some splendid building, by a triumph in celebration of some victory, or, mayhap, by the funeral of a distinguished citizen. For each set of *ludi* a certain sum of money was granted from the public treasury; the remainder of the expenses, invariably large and ever tending to grow larger, was met by the magistrate in charge of the *ludi*. From the statement that part of the expenses of the *ludi* was met from the state treasury it might be inferred that the state subsidized the theater. Such an inference would, however, be wide of the mark, since for centuries the attitude of the government toward the theater was an attitude of opposition. To orthodox Roman sentiment the witnessing of plays long seemed a waste of time, and consequently well-nigh immoral. To strike the truth, then,



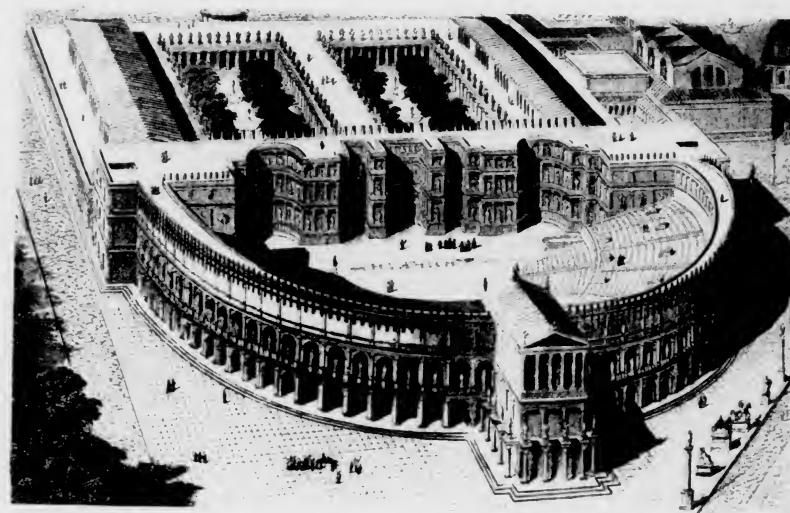
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in this connection we must say that the government subsidized the *ludi* and, more or less against its will, suffered dramatic performances to be given at the *ludi*. This attitude of the government may be well illustrated by the recital of certain facts.

According to Roman tradition, it was 194 B. C. before any space was set aside at theatrical performances for the



FIG. 2. THE THEATER OF MARCELLUS IN ROME.

senators, the highest part, socially and politically, of the Roman community. In that year the space nearest the stage was reserved for the senators. Since no mention of seats is made by Livy, our authority here, we must suppose that the privilege under discussion was merely the right to stand or to sit on the ground nearer to the stage than the rest of the spectators. Simple as this innovation was, none the less, according to Livy, *praebuit rumores*.

In the next forty years attempts were made to construct a permanent stage of stone, but they were as often frustrated by the censors. Indeed, as late as 151 B. C., the senate, on motion of P. Scipio Nasica, adopted reactionary measures and ordained that henceforth no one should wish to set seats for spectators or to sit down himself at a theatrical performance, either at Rome or within a mile of the city gates! Not till 55 B. C. did Rome possess a stone theater. Long before this there had been stone theaters in provincial towns of Italy, though we ought perhaps to admit that in nearly all cases, if not in all cases, these towns were Greek rather than Roman in origin and character. The theater erected in 55 B. C. was built by Pompey, then at the height of his reputation and popularity (fig. 1). A curious story, given by one pagan and one Christian Roman writer, testifies to the strength of the prejudice against a permanent theater-structure. Pompey, say Aulus Gellius and Tertullian, built a temple of Venus in such a way that the rows of seats of the theater (the *gradus*) formed the only way of approach to the temple. The populace was invited to the dedication not of a theater but of a temple of Venus, to which, added Pompey slyly, I have appended seats for a theater. Of course, since the seats were there, fully constructed, so practical a people as the Romans did not allow them to remain unused. Forty-two years more passed before Rome possessed a second theater of stone. Then, in 13 B. C., the Theater of Balbus and the Theater of Marcellus (figs. 2, 3) were dedicated. No other permanent theater-structure was erected in Rome. Frequently, under the empire, temporary wooden theater-structures seem to have been erected for special occasions.

THE ROMAN THEATER

Theatrical performances began early in the morning, so early, in fact, that some of the spectators came breakfastless to the play; others actually sought their places during the night before the performance. Several plays were given in succession. On such occasions a halt was made at noontime for refreshments. Refreshments were supplied at times without charge, as in the amphitheater and the circus, by the *editor*, the magistrate in

One preliminary observation must be made. It is not possible to speak of the Roman theater without speaking also of the Greek theater. The Roman theater-structure was the Greek theater-structure, modified; Roman plays, at least those that count for us, the Comedies of Plautus and Terence,¹ were all laid on Greek soil; the costumes worn by the actors were in all respects Greek. The plays of Plautus and Terence were adaptations of Greek



FIG. 3. RESTORATION OF THEATER OF MARCELLUS AND NEIGHBORING BUILDINGS IN ROME.

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Into the history of theater-structures among the Romans it is not possible to go in this article, further than has already been done in the foregoing pages. There is space only to deal with the developed structure of the latter part of the first century B. C. and later.

In a word, the history of the Roman theater is a chapter or series of chapters in the later history of the Greek theater.

With only a few exceptions the Greeks laid their theaters against a hill-side, to take advantage of the natural slope of the ground. Familiar examples are the Dionysiac theater at Athens (fig.

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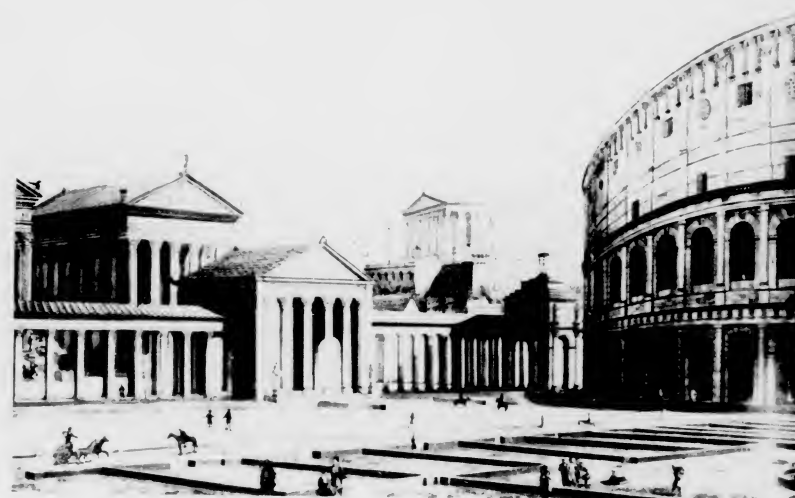


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FIG. 4. THE THEATER OF DIONYSUS AT ATHENS.

THE ROMAN THEATER

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4), the theater at Argos, and the beautiful theater at Epidauros (fig. 5). At Rome all three stone theaters stood on the Campus Martius, which was perfectly flat; hence massive and costly substructures of concrete faced with stone or bricks were needed to carry the tiers of seats. A portion of the substructures of the theater of Marcellus is still visible. A series of twelve arches, in two tiers, may be seen, the lower adorned with engaged columns or pilasters of the Tusco-Doric order, the upper with Ionic columns; above is the modern wall (figs. 2, 3). The effect is thus similar to that of the exterior of the Coliseum. In the Villa of Hadrian, near Tivoli, one may see, standing free in its entire compass, the semicircular structure carrying the seats. A feature of this theater, unique, so far as I know, is seen in the three passageways which, at points distant from the front of the stage, lead from the open space behind the auditorium beneath the tiers of seats to the interior of the theater (the orchestra).²

It was noted above that the surviving portion of the Theater of Marcellus reminds one of the Coliseum. If we add that the orthodox Roman theater, both within and without, was exactly semicircular in form, we shall be able to visualize, without difficulty, the fully developed Roman theater (cf. fig. 1).

Between the Greek theater-structure and the Roman theater-structure there were, besides the points of contrast already noted, two particularly characteristic differences. One is concerned with the orchestra, its shape and the uses to which it was put, the other with the

relation of the stage³ and the auditorium to each other.

In the Greek theater the orchestra (etymologically the 'dancing-place': cf. *ὀρχεῖσθαι*, 'to dance'), the place where the chorus sang and danced and performed its evolutions, was of prime importance in the actual presentation of plays. In fact, historically the orchestra preceded the place for the spectators. For the moment we may sum up the history of the Graeco-Roman drama as a history of the diminishing importance of the chorus, and the increasing importance of the actors, or, to put the same facts in another way, the history of the transformation of a performance consisting wholly of singing and dancing into a performance largely dramatic. We say largely dramatic, not wholly dramatic, because passages delivered as song, with elaborate musical accompaniment, and passages delivered in recitative formed always a large part of Greek and Roman plays, both tragic and comic, so that ancient plays resembled an opera or operetta more closely than they did the something we call a play. Now, originally, in the Greek theater the orchestra was an exact circle. Such a circular orchestra, 64 feet in diameter, was traced by Dr. Dörpfeld beneath the visible remains of the Dionysiac theater at Athens; we see one plainly still at Epidauros (fig. 5). As the importance of the chorus diminished, the place allotted to it became smaller. In its final form, however, the orchestra of the Greek theater always exceeded a semicircle; this is the case with the visible orchestra in the theater of Dionysus at Athens (fig. 4). In Roman plays the chorus was a rarity; it never oc-

² These passages resemble the *parodoi* of the Roman theater, described below (page 144); they are distinct from them, however, in their distance from the stage.

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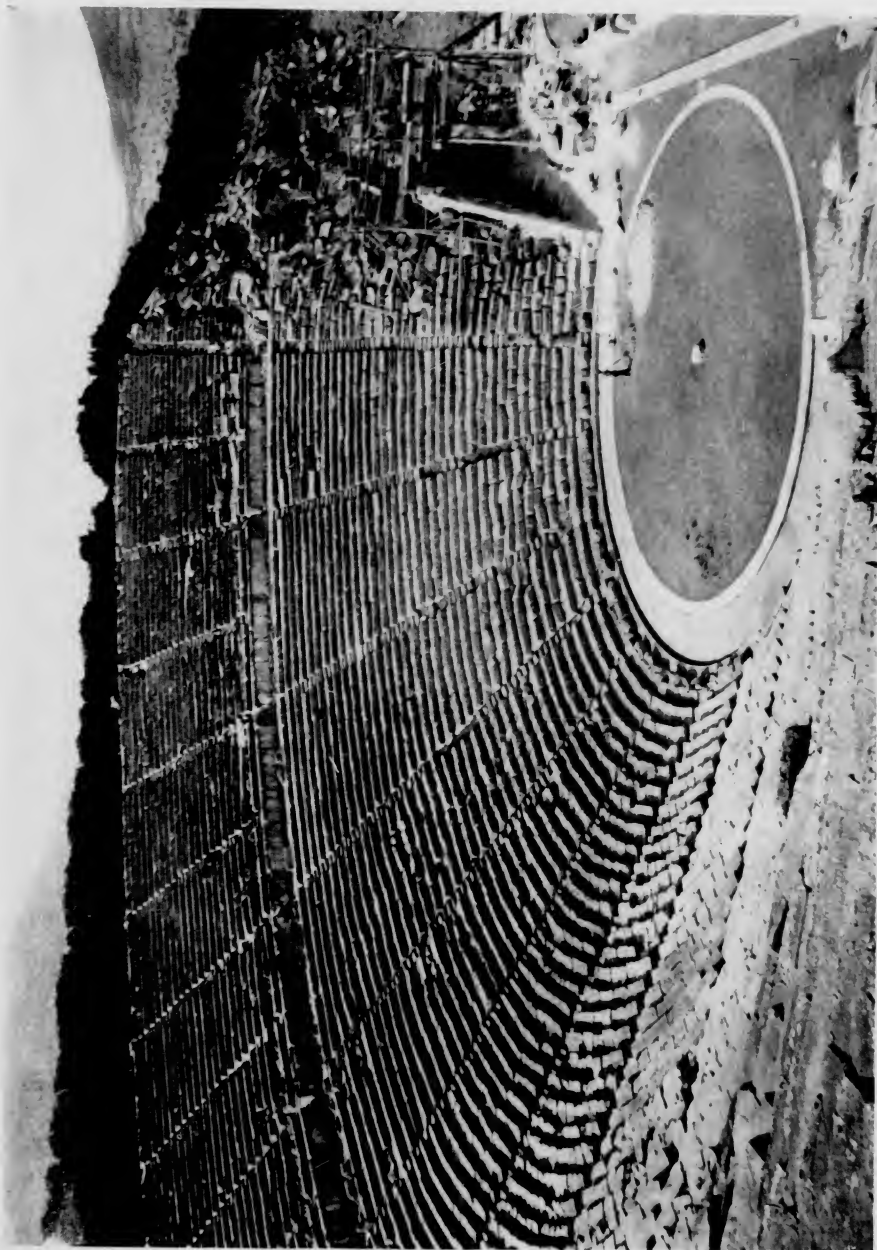


FIG. 5. THE GREEK THEATER AT EPIDAUROS.

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Let us consider now the other special point of difference between the Greek and the Roman theater-structure. In the Greek theater, stage and auditorium were separated from each other by an open space, ten feet or more in width, which could be closed at the outer end by gates (fig. 5). There was thus, at either side, an uncovered passageway from the outside world into the theater (the orchestra), bounded on the one side by the front of the stage, on the other by the end of the auditorium. Viewed either from the stage or from the auditorium, these passageways were *side-ways*, and so were called by the Greeks *parodoi*, 'side-roads', 'by-roads.' Through the *parodoi* the chorus entered the orchestra near the beginning of the play; through them the chorus withdrew from the orchestra when the play was done. If there was no stage in the Greek theater, and if all the performers, actors and chorus both, played their rôles only in the orchestra, as many scholars, following Dr. Dörpfeld, believe, then actors too entered and withdrew by the *parodoi*. Spectators also could enter (or leave) the orchestra by the *parodoi*; from the orchestra they could climb upward, if need be, to the higher seats. Indeed, some Greek theaters lie in such fashion against the supporting hill-

side that the *parodoi* form the only means of ingress and egress for the spectators. It may be noted that the ends of the auditorium, right and left, did not lie in a straight line, parallel to the stage, but were so built that, if prolonged, they would intersect within the orchestra.

In turning to consider in detail the form of the Roman theater-structure, we have occasion to mention, for the first time, Vitruvius, the Roman engineer and architect of the time of Augustus, who, in his work *On Architecture*,⁴ Book V, gives us important information concerning the Greek and the Roman theater, especially the latter. Vitruvius believed that in the Greek theater there was a stage, narrow and shallow (10 to 12 feet high, 8 feet deep), on which the actors played their parts; below them, in the orchestra, was the chorus. In the Roman theater, said Vitruvius, the stage must be deeper than the stage of the Greek theater, because in the Roman theater all the performers—actors, chorus when there was one, and supernumeraries (the Romans were fond of elaborate stage-spectacles: see the quotation from Horace, below, page 145)—played their parts. Further, says Vitruvius, the stage of the Roman theater must be lower than that of the Greek theater, for the following reason. As already made plain, the orchestra in the Roman theater was not used for the chorus. There seldom was a chorus in a Roman play; when there was one, its members took places on the stage. The orchestra was set apart for the seats of the senators. "Therefore," says Vitruvius, "the stage must not exceed five feet in

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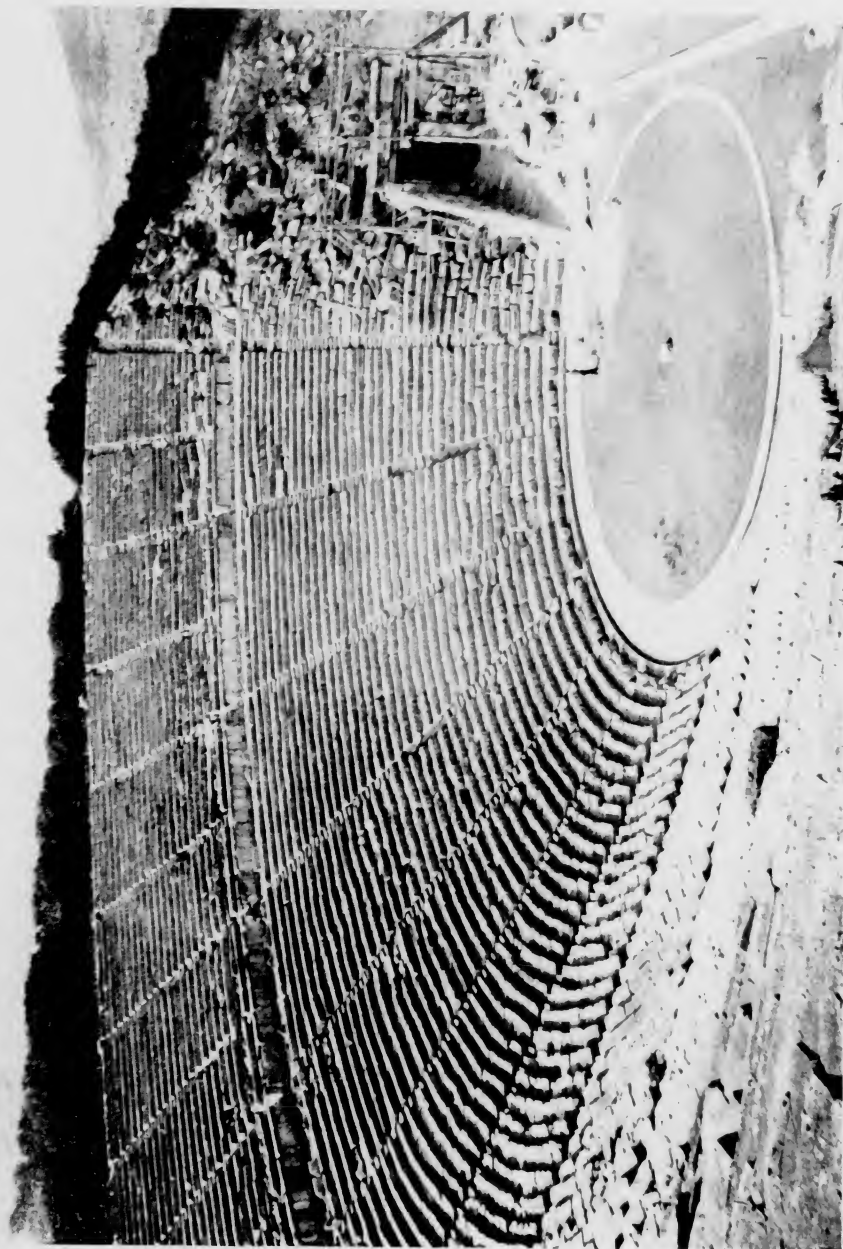


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The stage of the larger theater at Pompeii is about three feet high (fig. 6). The height of the stage in other Roman theaters varies between three feet and five. To gain the greater depth of stage necessary in the Roman theater, the front of the Greek stage (so Vitruvius seems to imply) was brought forward till it met the ends of the auditorium, which in this case ran straight, and so formed parts of one straight line. As a result, in the Roman theater stage and auditorium are tied together in a single organic whole. The open *parodoi*, so conspicuous a feature of the Greek theater, have disappeared. In their place the Romans constructed vaulted passages running from points beyond the back of the auditorium, under the tiers of seats, along the front of the stage, into the orchestra (fig. 6). These passages, though so different from the *parodoi* of the Greek theater, were still known as *parodoi* or *parodi*. This innovation in the Roman theater led to another. At the inner end of the auditorium, at each side, at the point where the seats reached the front line of the stage, the Romans laid level platforms, of some size, accessible only by special staircases lying along the front of the stage. These platforms were called *tribunalia*, and may be described as the private boxes of the Roman theater. Here, on special seats, the *ediles*, or magistrate superintending the *ludi* at which the theatrical performance was being given, and such guests as convention or his own desires required him to honor, had private places, reached, as hinted above, by staircases quite distinct

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We may now examine in detail some existing Roman theaters, beginning with those at Pompeii. Pompeii, though a provincial town of no great size, possessed two theaters, which are commonly called the Large Theater and the Small Theater or Odeum.

The Large Theater (fig. 6) was built originally in the Oscan or pre-Roman period of the city, at a time, however, when the influence of Greek culture had made itself felt. Shortly before the Christian era the theater was rebuilt: the new parts corresponded to Roman methods of theater-building. The Greek character of this theater is seen in the fact that the orchestra embraces much more than a semicircle, in the further fact that the walls of the *parodoi*, if prolonged, would intersect (the convergence is, however, slight), and, finally, in the far more significant fact that much of the *cavea*, or auditorium, lies against a hillside. This theater is close to the southern limits of Pompeii, at a point where the ground falls away so abruptly that, although elsewhere the Pompeians defended their city with heavy walls, they saw no need of such defences here. Counting from the orchestra upward, we have twenty-four rows of seats (*gradus*) in this theater lying against the hill-side. The Roman character of the theater is seen with equal distinctness in the *tribunalia*, over the inner ends of the vaulted *parodoi*, in the low, deep stage, in the *crypta*, or covered passageway running all round the theater beneath the uppermost block of seats.

those of the gallery (for the use of the *crypta* see below), and, lastly, in the elaborate arched construction, in two tiers of arches, built, at the time of the Roman reconstruction, to carry the four rows of seats in the gallery.

We are ready now for further details. The stage, as already noted, is about three feet in height. At the auditorium end

this there are to be plays. What joy it will be, he cries, to mark how the embroidered Britons lift that grand crimson curtain from the ground! In *Epistles* 2, 1, 189 ff., Horace, writing disgustedly of the perverted taste of contemporary Roman audiences, says:⁵

For four hours or more the curtain is kept down while squadrons of horse and



FIG. 6. THE LARGE THEATER AT POMPEII.

we see two walls, three feet or more apart. Within this space, no doubt covered in ancient times, worked once the roller with the aid of which the curtain was drawn down at the beginning of the play, and up at its close. The curtain was elaborately embroidered. These points are compactly put for us by Vergil, *Georgics* 3, 25. Vergil will hold, he declares, a great festival in honor of Augustus; at

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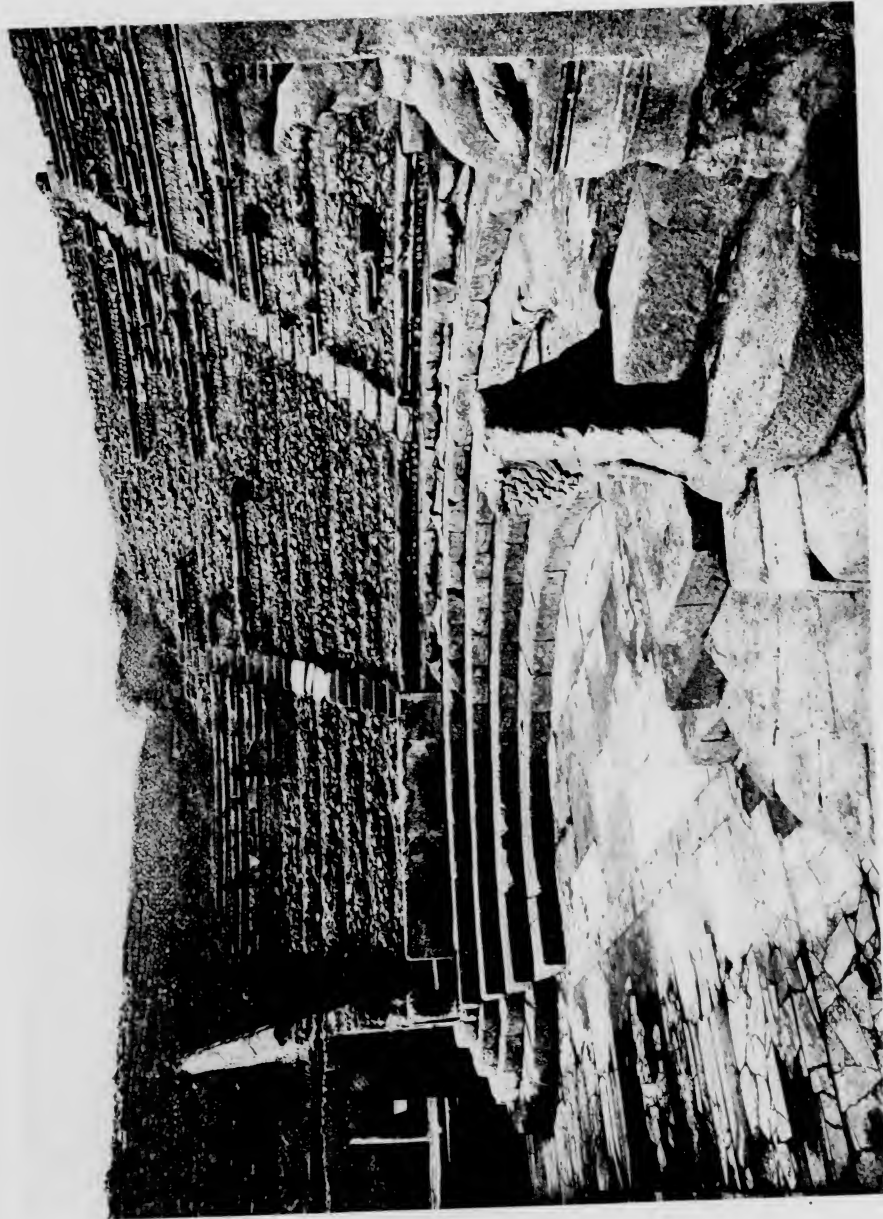


FIG. 7. THE SMALL THEATER AT POMPEII.

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Turning now to the seats we mark first the orchestra, the part of the auditorium nearest the stage, with its four low steps or series of seats (*gradus*) covered with marble. Since these steps are entirely too low for anyone to sit on them with comfort, we may conclude that the local dignitaries who had reserved places here (see below, page 148) sat on *bisellia* or chairs brought to the theater by their slaves. At the top of the orchestra there was, no doubt, a stone balustrade, like that still to be seen at the top of the orchestra in the Small Theater (fig. 7), separating the steps or *gradus* of the orchestra from a *praecinctio* (‘girdle,’ ‘belt’) or landing (lobby) above. This landing is reached from the orchestra by flights of steps which break the line of the balustrade at three points.

Next comes the *media cavea*, or central part of the auditorium. Here the *gradus* are divided by six stairways (*scalae*) into seven wedges (*cunei*). At the top of the *media cavea* is a second *praecinctio*, bounded on the far side by a high wall. The latter is pierced by six doors, designated by the Romans by the striking term *vomitaria*, corresponding to the six

scalae: these lead out into the corridor (*crypta*) that runs round beneath the *summa cavea* or gallery. The *summa cavea* was about ten or twelve feet wide and sloped downward at an angle of forty degrees. It contained probably not more than four rows of seats (*gradus*); there were probably here too six *scalae* and as many *vomitaria*, leading out in part to the Forum Triangulare, to the west, in part to a corridor which in its turn gave access to the neighboring streets, *via* a great open space behind (north of) the rounded, arched exterior of the theater.

Some of the marble seats of the *media cavea* are still *in situ*. On a part of these, individual places, a little less than sixteen inches wide, are marked off by vertical lines in front. The places are also numbered. They may have belonged to some corporation or guild (*collegium*: there were many such at Pompeii) which found it necessary, in order to avoid confusion, to assign seats to its members by numbers. We may note that at Athens similar lines are to be seen in the Dionysiac theater: the space granted there to each spectator is somewhat less. London theater managers allow but twelve inches to each spectator in the gallery. In the ‘bleachers’ at American ball games sixteen inches per spectator is a liberal allowance. Frequently, the rear part of each *gradus* was somewhat depressed, and the lower part of the front face of the next higher *gradus* was cut back somewhat, to make convenient resting places for the feet of the spectators. In this way, too, protection was afforded to the holiday (white) garments of the spectators. This device is to be seen, for instance, in the Small Theater at Pompeii and in the Dionysiac Theater at Athens (figs. 7 and 4).

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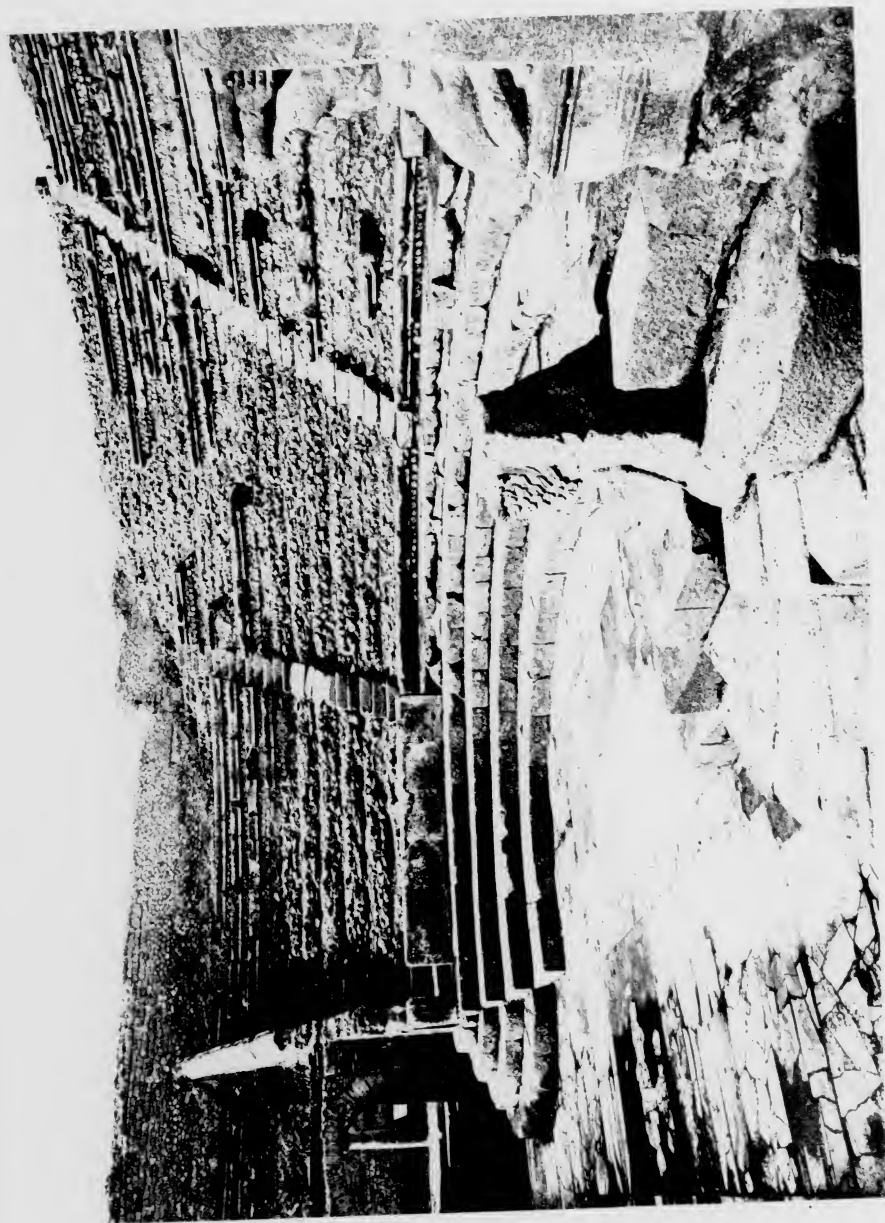


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The *crypta* or corridor was about ten feet wide and from twelve to fifteen feet in

height. It had a vaulted roof and was cool, airy, sweet, a comfortable lounging-place. It is apparent that the spectators could find their way to their seats with the utmost ease and could scatter again quickly, in case of need, as for instance if rain fell unexpectedly. Those in the *summa cavea* could enter or depart without coming into contact at all with the spectators in the *media cavea* or the orchestra. The occupants of the *media cavea* had their choice of entrances and exits; they might enter, from above, via the *crypta*, or from below by way of the *parodoi* and the orchestra. The orchestra could be entered from above by way of the *crypta*, or by the *parodoi*. The *parodoi*, it will be seen by a



FIG. 8. THEATER TICKET

glance at figure 6, were divided into two passageways. Of these, the one nearer the stage, level throughout its length, led directly into the bottom of the orchestra. The other passageway was an inclined plane which led up on the *praecinctio* behind (above) the orchestra. It may be added that tickets, of metal or bone, called *tesserae theatrales*, showing clearly the seat to which the bearer was entitled, have come down to us. One (fig. 8) shows that the bearer was entitled to a seat in the *cavea secunda* (or *media*), in the third *cuneus*, and the eighth *gradus*, at a performance of the *Casina* of Plautus. This play, by the way, is extant, though in mutilated form. This great convenience of entrance and exit was accomplished mainly by means of the *praecinctiones*, which cut the theater into strongly marked divisions.

Yet another purpose was served by the divisions effected by the *praecinc-*

tionēs. In the Dionysiac theater at Athens the row of seats nearest the stage consisted of roomy marble seats or thrones (25 inches wide by 23 deep). Since, as has been well said, the spectator at Athens who sat watching a tragedy or a comedy was taking part in a religious ceremony, so close was the relation between the drama and religion, we are not surprised to learn that these thrones were reserved primarily for the priests, then for other dignitaries of the city, or for foreign ambassadors, or, as a special mark of honor, for other persons. At Rome distinctions between spectators long remained unknown. When distinctions were made, the best seats were not assigned to the priests, for the drama had no such religious significance for the Romans as it had had for the Greeks, but were set apart for the more aristocratic portion of the community. The orchestra was by law set apart for the senators; later, perhaps after 67 B.C., the first fourteen rows back of the orchestra were, by the law of Roscius Otho, reserved, at Rome, for the knights. Similar arrangements obtained in Roman theaters outside of Rome, though in a provincial town like Pompeii as many as fourteen rows of seats can hardly have been necessary for the knights.

Augustus regulated the whole matter afresh. He confirmed the special privileges already granted to senators and to knights; he relegated the lowest classes to the highest seats, and made the women sit apart, likewise in the uppermost places. It is possible that he was the sponsor also for the more exact regulations laid down concerning places of honor for magistrates, priests, etc. The seats of highest honor were those on the *tribunalia*. Here the *editor* and the emperor sat, on the right side; on the other tribunal the Vestal Virgins had their places, and with them

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The Small Theater, or Odeum (fig. 7), at Pompeii is noteworthy in that it had a permanent roof; this is proved by an

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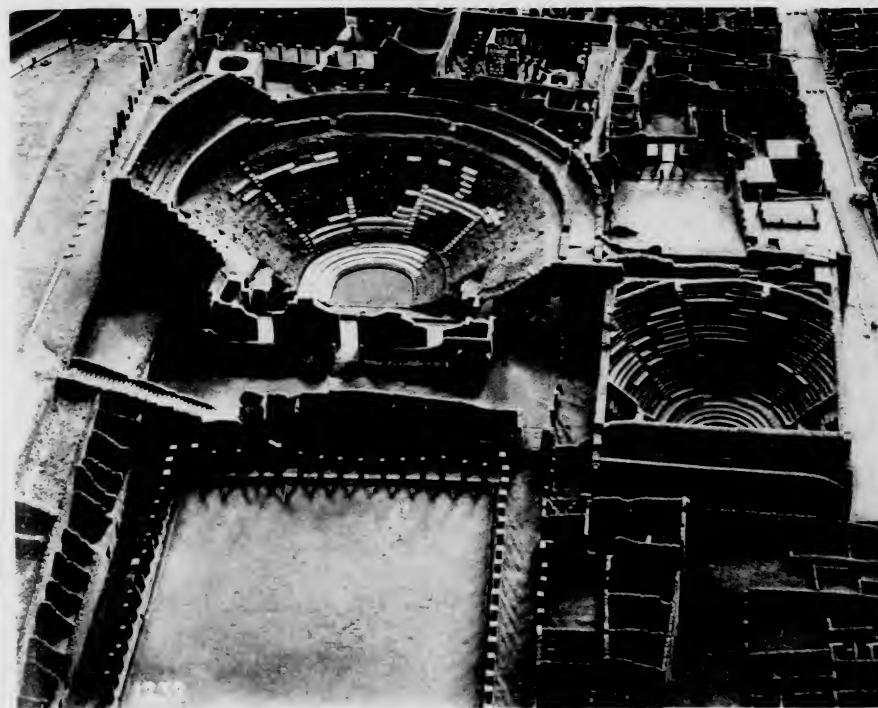


FIG. 9. PART OF CORK MODEL OF POMPEII SHOWING THE TWO THEATERS, NATIONAL MUSEUM, NAPLES.

inscription found within the theater. This roof was no doubt of wood; the side walls were not strong enough to carry a vaulted stone ceiling or roof. The roof, further, is thought to have been pyramidal in shape; there were windows, perhaps, in the walls between the highest seats and the roof. The Odeum of Herodes Atticus

This theater, which was used perhaps rather as a music-hall (the roof would improve the acoustic properties of the structure), could accommodate no more than 1,500 persons; the Large Theater at Pompeii could give seats to 5,000.

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hall), especially in Greece, made a permanent roof out of the question. Among the Romans a curtain (*velum* or *velarium*) was frequently drawn over the theater. This curtain was supported by ropes stretched from masts set along the bounding wall of the theater. Valerius Maximus declares that such awnings were introduced in 78 B. C. Lucretius, arguing that all bodies are constantly throwing off thin, filmy particles, e.g., particles of color, goes on to say:

This is done by the yellow and red and blue awnings, when they are spread over large theaters and flutter as they stretch across their poles and crossbeams, for then they dye the seated assemblage with their color and all the show of the stage and the richly attired company of the fathers and compel them to dance in their color.

In another place the same poet declares that the clouds

give forth a sound over the levels of the wide-stretching upper world, as at times a canvas awning stretched over large theaters makes a crackling noise, as it flaps among the masts and beams; sometimes, rent by the boisterous gales, it madly howls and closely imitates the rasping noise of pieces of paper.

At Pompeii advertisements of gladiatorial combats sometimes contained a promise that there would be an awning.

We get from the Large Theater at Pompeii some light on the devices used in connection with the *velum*. On the inner side of the bounding wall which runs along the west side of the theater are projecting blocks or corbels of basalt, standing out a foot or more; in these are holes, about eight inches square. At least eight of these corbels can be plainly traced, by means of the shadows they cast, in figure 6. In the blocks which form the coping of the wall are incisions over the holes

in the corbels. Below the corbels in the *praeaeinctio* at the top of the *summa cavea* are holes which go down three feet or more. Masts passed through the incisions in the coping and the holes in the corbels and sank into the holes in the *praeaeinctio*. From these masts were stretched the ropes which supported the awning. In the Coliseum and the great theater at Orange the devices for carrying the masts are on the outside. At Pompeii, where the theaters face the south and so received the sun the major part of the day, an awning in the Large Theater was a desideratum (the Small Theater had a roof: see above). Indeed, Roman tradition declared that the *velum* was a Campanian invention. Vitruvius specifically directs that the theater shall not have a southern exposure; but at Pompeii, manifestly, convenience of building, through the possibility of laying so much of the Large Theater against the hill-side, outweighed considerations of health.

Next we consider exits. Vitruvius declares that the builders of theaters should provide many spacious entrances (exits), so arranged that the upper shall be wholly disconnected from the lower, and that all shall run in straight lines, without turns, that there may be nothing to check the egress of the spectators in case of sudden emergency. We have at Pompeii exceptionally favorable opportunities for learning how, in the matter of exits, facts compared with theory in Roman theater-building.

Citizens of Pompeii itself would find their way from the city to the Large Theater most readily via the Forum Triangulare. This they would enter from the north. In the high wall bounding the Large Theater on its west side there were three doors of service

to theater-goers. The northernmost leads into an open space behind the rounded arched exterior at the back (or north side) of the theater (see fig. 9). Close at hand, in this open space, is an entrance to the *crypta* or corridor beneath the seats of the gallery. Passing within this entrance and crossing the *crypta*, one issues by a *vomitorium* directly opposite the entrance upon the *praeaeinctio* at the top of

or, if he will, by at least two staircases to the *summa cavea* or gallery. By the middle doorway in the west boundary wall one may step down a foot or so directly into the *crypta*, cross that, and by the *vomitorium* nearest the stage on the right-hand side reach the *praeaeinctio* at the top of the *media cavea*. Doorways and *vomitatoria* are six feet high. From this middle doorway, again, a staircase leads to the



Photograph by Ralph Van Deman Magoffin.

FIG. 10. THE ROMAN THEATER AT TUSCULUM.

the *media cavea*, twenty-four rows of seats above the orchestra. This *vomitorium* is the second from the right-hand side of the stage. Instead of entering the *crypta*, however, one may keep to his left around the open space behind the arched exterior of the theater, to gain access to the *crypta* by at least three other doorways and across the *crypta* to the *praeaeinctio*,

summa cavea. The staircase comes out on a corridor which ran around behind the *summa cavea*. Three arches of this corridor yet remain; the foundations of twenty-five or thirty others are visible, swinging far round to the left side of the theater. By the third or southernmost doorway in the west boundary wall one may mount by a staircase to the *summa cavea*. One may,

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give forth a sound over the levels of the wide-stretching upper world, as at times a canvas awning stretched over large theaters makes a crackling noise, as it flaps among the masts and beams; sometimes, rent by the boisterous gales, it madly howls and closely imitates the rasping noise of pieces of paper.

At Pompeii advertisements of gladiatorial combats sometimes contained a promise that there would be an awning.

We get from the Large Theater at Pompeii some light on the devices used in connection with the *velum*. On the inner side of the bounding wall which runs along the west side of the theater are projecting blocks or corbels of basalt, standing out a foot or more; in these are holes, about eight inches square. At least eight of these corbels can be plainly traced, by means of the shadows they cast, in figure 6. In the blocks which form the coping of the wall are incisions over the holes

in the corbels. Below the corbels in the *praeaeinctio* at the top of the *summa cavea* are holes which go down three feet or more. Masts passed through the incisions in the coping and the holes in the corbels and sank into the holes in the *praeaeinctio*. From these masts were stretched the ropes which supported the awning. In the Coliseum and the great theater at Orange the devices for carrying the masts are on the outside. At Pompeii, where the theaters face the south and so received the sun the major part of the day, an awning in the Large Theater was a desideratum (the Small Theater had a roof; see above). Indeed, Roman tradition declared that the *velum* was a Campanian invention. Vitruvius specifically directs that the theater shall not have a southern exposure; but at Pompeii, manifestly, convenience of building, through the possibility of laying so much of the Large Theater against the hill-side, outweighed considerations of health.

Next we consider exits. Vitruvius declares that the builders of theaters should provide many spacious entrances (exits), so arranged that the upper shall be wholly disconnected from the lower, and that all shall run in straight lines, without turns, that there may be nothing to check the egress of the spectators in case of sudden emergency. We have at Pompeii exceptionally favorable opportunities for learning how, in the matter of exits, facts compared with theory in Roman theater-building.

Citizens of Pompeii itself would find their way from the city to the Large Theater most readily via the Forum Triangulare. This they would enter from the north. In the high wall bounding the Large Theater on its west side there were three doors of service

to theater-goers. The northernmost leads into an open space behind the rounded arched exterior at the back (or north side) of the theater (see fig. 9). Close at hand, in this open space, is an entrance to the *crypta* or corridor beneath the seats of the gallery. Passing within this entrance and crossing the *crypta*, one issues by a *vomitorium* directly opposite the entrance upon the *praeaeinctio* at the top of

or, if he will, by at least two staircases to the *summa cavea* or gallery. By the middle doorway in the west boundary wall one may step down a foot or so directly into the *crypta*, cross that, and by the *vomitorium* nearest the stage on the right-hand side reach the *praeaeinctio* at the top of the *media cavea*. Doorways and *vomitores* are six feet high. From this middle doorway, again, a staircase leads to the



Photograph by Ralph Van Deman Magoffin.

FIG. 10. THE ROMAN THEATER AT TUSCULUM.

the *media cavea*, twenty-four rows of seats above the orchestra. This *vomitorium* is the second from the right-hand side of the stage. Instead of entering the *crypta*, however, one may keep to his left around the open space behind the arched exterior of the theater, to gain access to the *crypta* by at least three other doorways and across the *crypta* to the *praeaeinctio*,

the *summa cavea*. The staircase comes out on a corridor which ran around behind the *summa cavea*. Three arches of this corridor yet remain; the foundations of twenty-five or thirty others are visible, swinging far round to the left side of the theater. By the third or southernmost doorway in the west boundary wall one may mount by a staircase to the *summa cavea*. One may,

however, pass all three doorways in this west boundary wall, to find, some steps further south, a staircase leading down into a great open space, called the Theater Area, behind (south of) the stage of the Large Theater (see fig. 9). From this open space he may gain access readily to the *parodoi* of the Large Theater, and may make his way through them into the orchestra of the Large Theater, or he may enter the Small Theater by its right *parodos*, or, finally, he may reach Stabian Street and from it gain ready access to the Small Theater (see the next paragraph).

Suppose one wished to come from the country to witness a play at Pompeii. He would find it best to enter the city by Stabian Street, which ran along the east side of the Small Theater. In a minute or two after passing through the city gate he would come to a passage which turned left (west), at right angles, into the Theater Area, the large open space already mentioned as lying south of (behind) the Large Theater. From the Theater Area he could reach the *parodoi* of the Large Theater, and through them its orchestra, or he could mount to the Forum Triangulare, there to use the proper one of the three doorways in the west boundary wall of the Large Theater. He might, however, pass by this entrance from Stabian Street to the Theater Area, to find, a few feet further on (north), an entrance leading directly, by a step or two, from Stabian Street into the left *parodos* of the Small Theater. Beyond this, back (north) of the auditorium of the Small Theater, is a broad passageway, which leads straight from Stabian Street into the left *parodos* of the Large Theater. From this passageway, again,

one may reach, by a very broad doorway in the middle of the back (north) wall of the auditorium of the Small Theater, staircases springing right and left (west and east) to the top of the auditorium of the Small Theater; from these points he could make his way readily down to any seat. From Stabian Street, again, at a point some distance north of the back wall of the auditorium of the Small Theater, a steep path leads upwards (west) to the east side of the larger theater at a point near that *vomitorium* which was nearest the stage on the left hand side. Finally, from Stabian Street, from a point still further north, a street runs west, from which, in turn, an alley runs south on the east side of the Temple of Isis, till it enters the open space behind (north of) the rounded arched exterior of the Large Theater.

We see, then, that at Pompeii, at any rate, the exits correspond closely to the prescriptions of Vitruvius. With extraordinary ingenuity the builders of the two theaters utilized the opportunities afforded by the peculiar falling away of the ground in this quarter, by grouping the two theaters so closely together, and by binding them, as it were, into a single whole by an array of entrances and exits so well calculated to serve the needs of the theater-going public. When we add that the stairways were of stone, in walls themselves of concrete with facings of brick or stone, we see how immensely superior, in the matter of exits, these theaters were to the best-equipped theater in our own country.

Columbia University.

(to be continued)

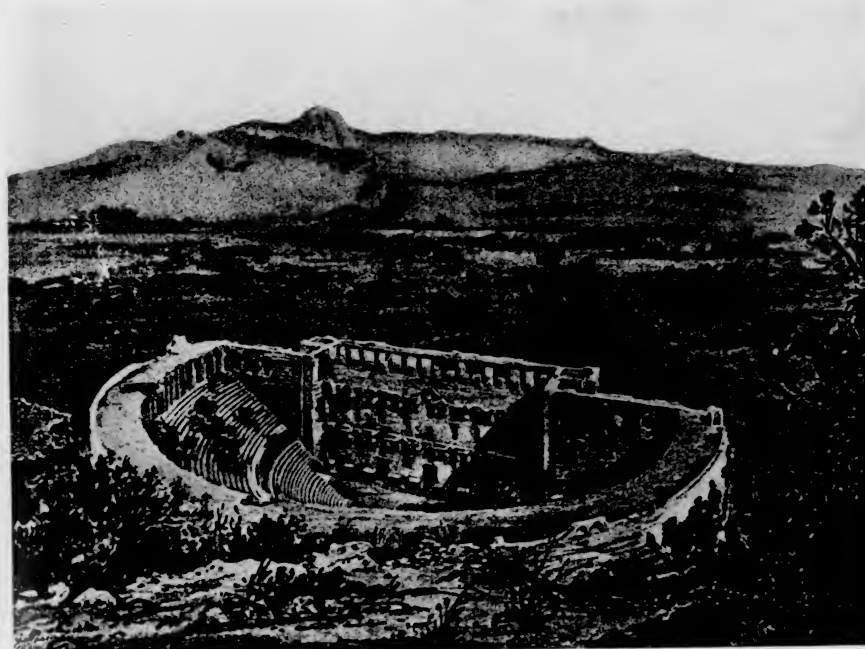


FIG. 11. THE THEATER AT ASPENDUS.

THE ROMAN THEATER

(Concluded)

CHARLES KNAPP

One more point must be noticed before we leave the theaters at Pompeii described at the end of the first article in the last number of *Art and Archaeology*. The back wall of the stage (*scaena*) in the Roman theater was regularly pierced by three doorways. The stage-setting of a comedy (the Romans cared far more for comedy than for tragedy) called for a street, on which one, two, or three houses should be visible. The scenery was so arranged that the doorways of the houses called for by the play came opposite the doorways in the *scaena*. In each side-wall

of the stage there was, as one would suppose *a priori*, a wide entrance to the stage. A peculiar convention obtained with respect to the significance of these side-entrances to the stage—a convention useful indeed, since there were no programmes. If an actor entered by the side-entrance to the right of the spectators it was understood at once that he came from the city, probably from its Forum, within which the scene of the play was laid. If he entered by the side-entrance to the left of the spectators it was understood that he was coming from foreign

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Columbia University.

(to be continued)

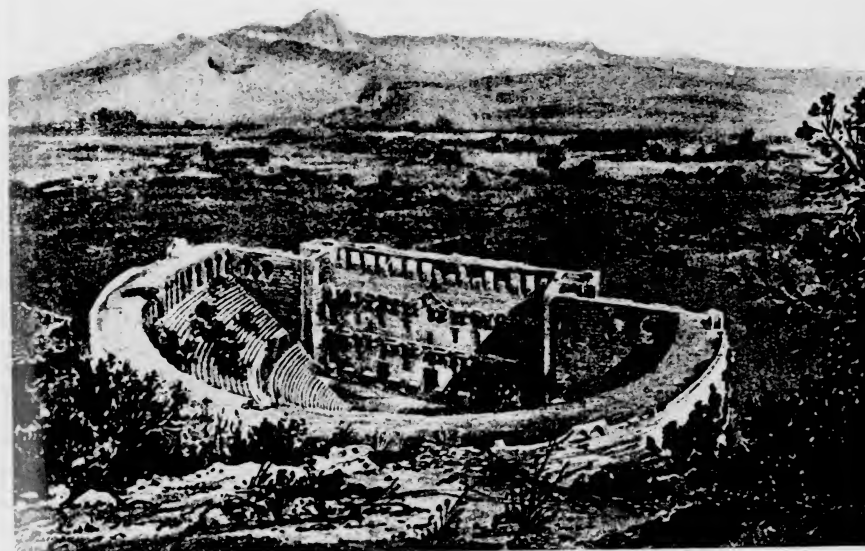


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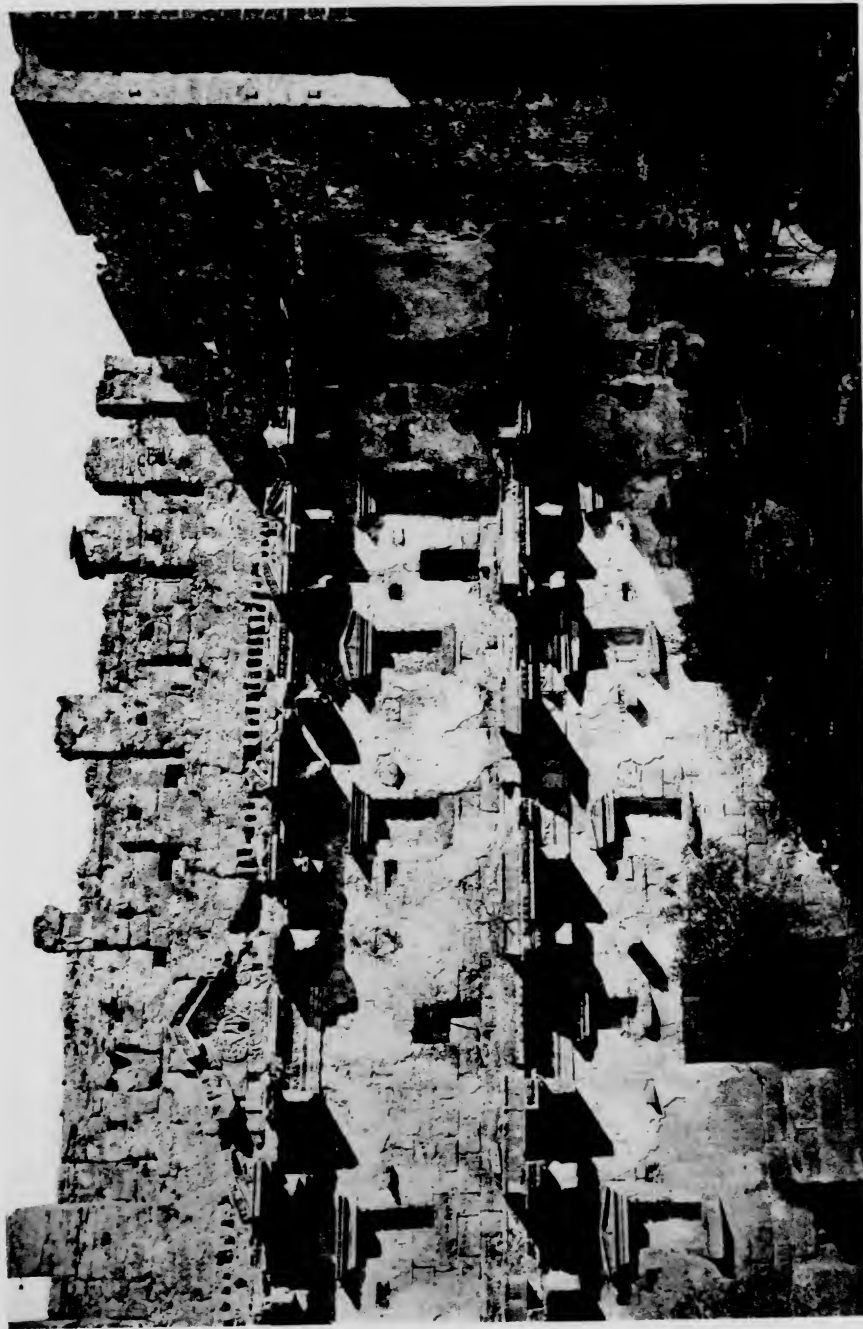
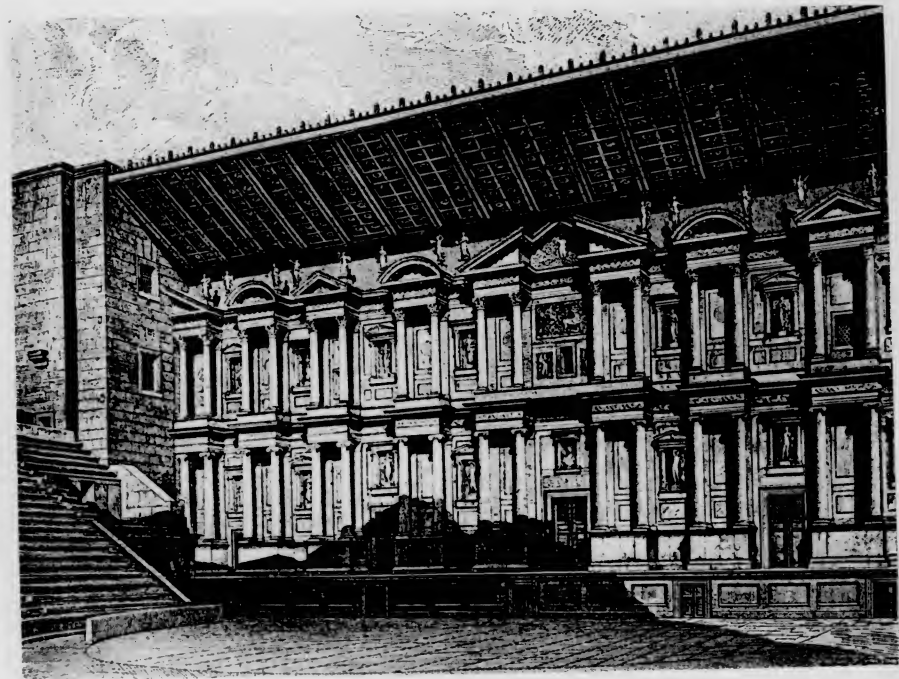


FIG. 12. FACADE OF THE STAGE OF THE ROMAN THEATER AT ASPENDUS, ASIA MINOR.



From Lanckoroński, *Städte Pamphyliens und Pisidiens*, I, pl. XXVII.

FIG. 13. RESTORATION OF THE STAGE OF THE THEATER AT ASPENDUS.

parts, via the harbor of the town in which the play was laid (ancient Greek travel, and hence the travel mentioned so frequently in the Roman plays, based all on Greek originals, was by sea rather than by land).

The theater at Aspendus, in Pamphylia, Asia Minor, is the best preserved of Roman theaters (fig. 11). There are, in the main part of the auditorium, thirty-nine rows of seats, divided into two parts by a *praecinctio*. Upon this *praecinctio* several *vomitoria* give from a *crypta* running round beneath the seats of the *media caeca*. The *parodoi* and the *tribunalia* are plainly visible; the *tribunal* is reached, in each case, by a special *vomitrium* from a covered corridor. Above the thirty-

nine rows of seats is a covered gallery, divided into fifty-three box-like compartments. Vitruvius directs that the top of such a colonnade shall lie in the same plane as the top of the *scaena*, the wall behind the stage, for the reason that the voice will then rise with equal power till it reaches the highest rows of seats and the roof. If the roof is not so high, in proportion as it is lower it will check the voice at the point which the sound first reaches.

The *scaena*, or wall at the back of the stage, was divided into three stories (the Romans were prone to divide high wall surfaces thus into three stories). The *scaena* was here, as always, richly decorated with columns and statues. The

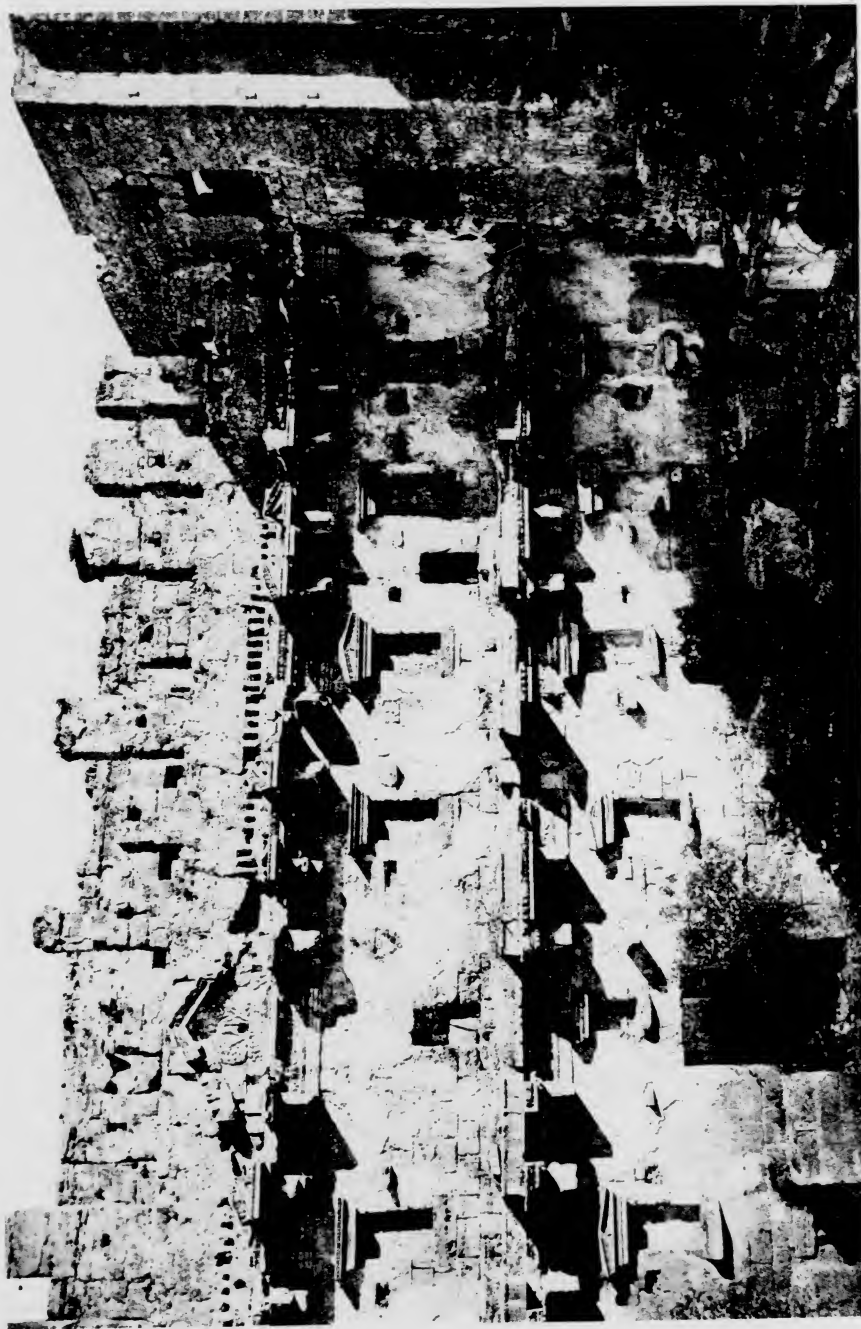


FIG. 12. FACADE OF THE STAGE OF THE ROMAN THEATER AT ASPENDUS, ASIA MINOR.

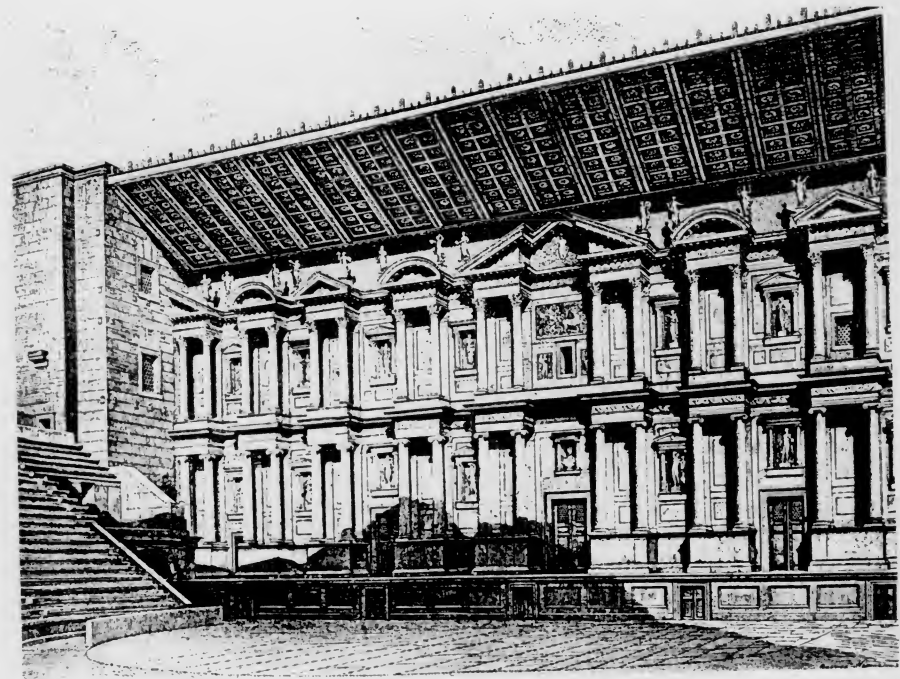
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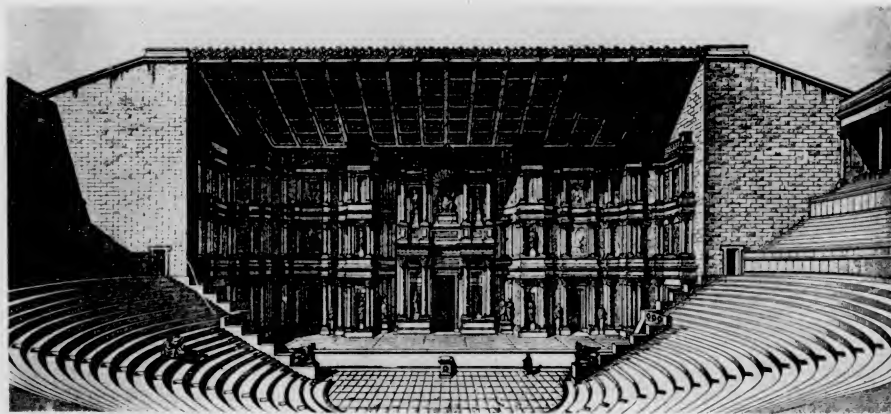


FIG. 14. RESTORATION OF THE STAGE OF THE THEATER AT ORANGE, SOUTHERN FRANCE.

theater, it must be remembered, served many purposes quite apart from the production of plays. In the theater large gatherings, for example, might be held for divers reasons. At such times the richly decorated *scaena* formed an attractive background.

In the theater at Aspendus we can still trace, high above the stage, the sloping line which marks where once the roof of the stage ran (fig. 11). Beginning at the top of the rectangular construction which forms the side of the stage (fig. 13) at the end nearer the auditorium, the roof sloped sharply downward to the *scaena*. Such a roof over the stage was prescribed for acoustic reasons. So too, for acoustic reasons, it was ordained that the floor of the stage should be of wood. This floor was called *pulpitum* or *pulpita*, a word whence 'pulpit' is derived, so that we have, etymologically at least, the connection between church and stage desiderated by so many worthy persons.

The great theater at Orange (Roman Arausio) in the southern part of France (fig. 14) was so well preserved that, twenty years or so ago, large portions of

the seats were reconstructed, the stage was remodeled, and performances by French actors, of ancient and modern plays both, have been given in this theater.⁶ The wall behind the stage (*scaena*) is well preserved. Behind that are the greenrooms, and the like, still in excellent condition. The wall (fig. 15) behind the greenrooms is 335 feet long, and 120 feet high (three-quarters of the height of the exterior wall of the Coliseum). The ruins of this splendid Roman theater dominate the town today as completely as the Roman power once dominated the territory in which the theater stands. Also in northern Africa at Dougga and Timgad there are well-preserved Roman theaters (figs. 16, 17),

The student of the Graeco-Roman theater, however, need not journey abroad to find tangible illustrations of the ancient theater. At Berkeley, California, on the grounds of the University of California, stands a beautiful Graeco-Roman theater,

⁶ For an account of such performances in 1894, see an article entitled "The Comedie Française at Orange," in *The Century Magazine* for June, 1895.

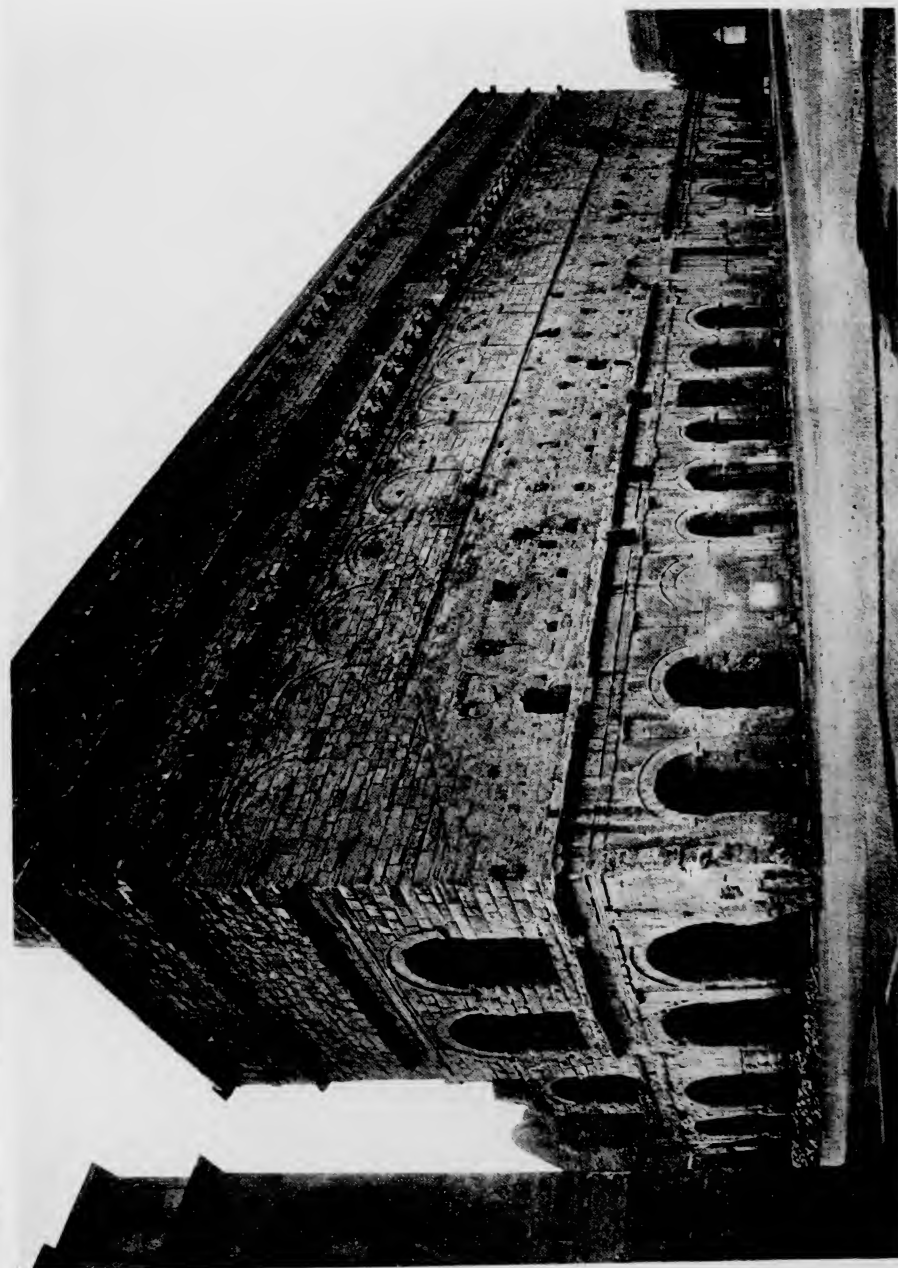


FIG. 15. THE ROMAN THEATER AT ORANGE, SOUTHERN FRANCE. EXTERIOR FAÇADE.

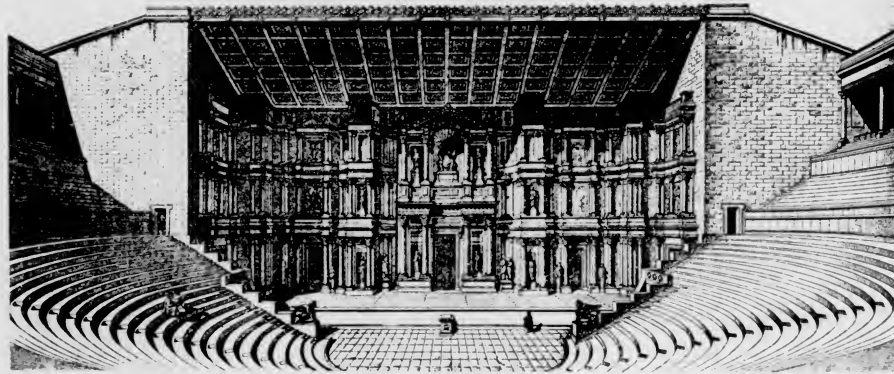


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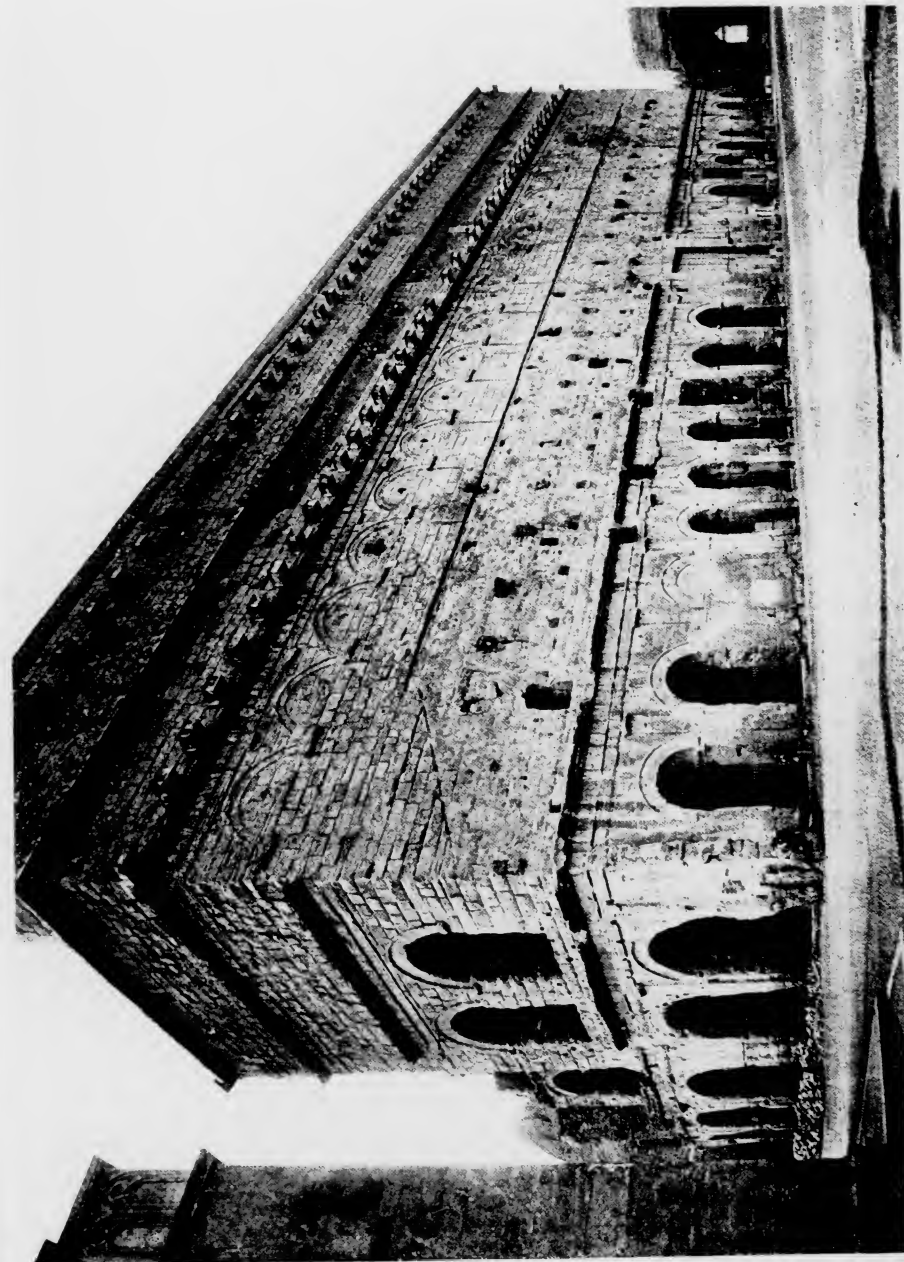


FIG. 15. THE ROMAN THEATER AT ORANGE, SOUTHERN FRANCE. EXTERIOR FAÇADE.

the gift of Mr. William R. Hearst (fig. 18). It is built against a hillside, in Greek fashion. The *parodoi* too are Greek; the orchestra is circular. The extreme diameter of the stone theater proper is 250 feet, but two tiers of wooden seats have been constructed beyond (above) the stone portion. There are two *praeactiones*: of these the lower is 8 feet wide, the upper, between the top of the stone seats and the

portion of the seat and the remainder of the seat. The ordinary seating capacity is about 7,000; by crowding and calling the aisles into use this may be increased to 8,500. The stage (fig. 19) is 150 feet by 28. In the center its height is 7 feet; hence this stage, at this point, is too high for the Roman theater, too low for the Greek theater, as that is described by Vitruvius. The *parodoi* are not level, but



FIG. 16. ROMAN THEATER AT DOUGGA, NORTH AFRICA.

wooden addition, $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet. There are 11 *gradus* between the orchestra and the lower *praeactionio*: these are very low, so that chairs must be set here for spectators. Above, between the two *praeactiones*, are 19 *gradus*, cut by 11 aisles into 10 *cunei* or sections. The seats are prodigally constructed, that is, there is no undercutting of the front of the seat, and no difference in level between the footrest

in the form of inclined planes or ramps leading down into the orchestra. To sum up, this theater is for the most part Greek; in its seating arrangements (in the orchestra) it is in part Roman; in the stage, it is neither Greek nor Roman.

Thus far we have dealt with the Roman theater-structure mainly as a receptacle, so to say, for spectators. We turn now to consider it with reference to the

production of plays. Our study must include the stage, the scenery, costumes, music, the actors, and the audience.

The stage-buildings may be divided into three parts: (1) the stage proper, the 'boards,' called *pulpitum* or *pulpita*; (2) the *scaena* proper, or permanent wall at the back of the *pulpitum*; (3) the *post-scaenium*, or portion behind the *scaena*, containing the dressing-rooms of the

of the stage. Such colonnades were attached to the Theater of Pompey at Rome. We may remind the reader of Vitruvius's two statements concerning the *pulpitum*: first, that it should be deeper than that of the Greek theater, because in the Roman theater all the performers play their parts on the stage; secondly, that it should not exceed five feet in height, else the senators and other distinguished personages who



FIG. 17. ROMAN THEATER AT TIMGAD, NORTH AFRICA.

actors, space for marshalling the processions for which the Romans had such fondness (compare the citation from Horace, pages 145-147, above), and the like. Vitruvius recommends that colonnades be constructed behind the theater, so that, when sudden showers interrupt plays, the people may have somewhere to retire from the theater, and that there may be room for the preparation of all the outfit

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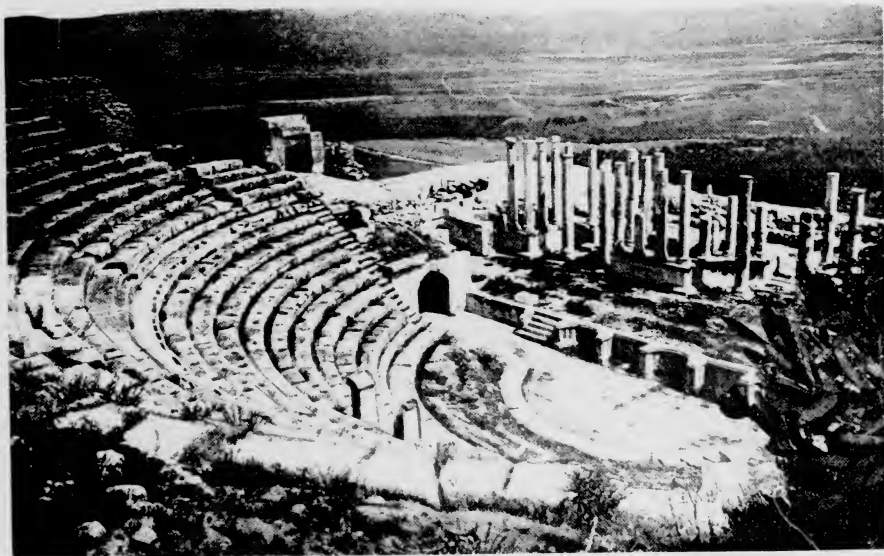


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stage was usually of great size. That of the Large Theater at Pompeii measured 105 feet by 20, that of the Odeum of Herodes Atticus 120 by 24, that of the Theater at Orange 203 by 50. It is interesting to note that the French, for the performances in the Theater at Orange, found it advisable to construct a stage much smaller than that of the ancient theater. Some scholars have seen in the great breadth of the Roman stage an explanation, at least in part, of the running scenes, so common in Plautus, that is, scenes in which slaves are described as running in hot haste across the stage, and yet consuming a long time to cover that space.

Of the height of the *scaena* and its decoration something has been said above (page 189), in the account of the Theater at Aspendus. The Theater at Orange and the Small Theater at Pompeii carry out the spirit of this injunction. At first the *scaena* was made of rough, unpainted boards. However, the custom of adorning the *scaena* became fixed at an early date, for in a temporary wooden theater erected by Aemilius Scaurus in 58 B.C. the *scaena* was divided into three stories, the lowest of which was adorned with slabs of marble; the middle story was lined with mosaics in glass, and the topmost story was built of gilded wood. 360 marble columns and 3,000 bronze statues graced this *scaena*. Lanciani (*Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries*, 242) says the columns were of Lucullan marble. He continues:

No wonder that the contractor for the maintenance of public drains should have required from M. Scaurus a security against any possible danger of the sinking of the streets in the transportation of his columns and blocks of marble, so heavy were they.

Pliny the Elder expresses his astonishment that such splendor, especially the blocks of marble, should have been tolerated in a city which took it amiss that one of its richest citizens, the orator Crassus, adorned the atrium of his house with six columns of Hymettan marble, only 12 feet high.

Vitruvius divides scenery into three classes: tragic, comic, and satyric. According to his description, the prominent features in a tragic setting were columns, pediments, statues, and other signs of regal magnificence—in a word a palace and its accessories (or a temple). In comedy the setting represented one or more private houses with projecting balconies and windows overlooking the street. The setting of a satyric drama, or play in which satyrs and the like appeared, comprised trees, grottoes, mountains, and "other rustic objects delineated in landscape style," says Vitruvius.

In 17 of the 25 extant tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides the scene is laid in front of a palace or a temple. In these tragedies the general character of the scenery required would be such as Vitruvius describes. How easily such scenery was supplied may be seen from the fact that the *scaena* of the Theater at Berkeley has in itself served admirably as proper setting for performances of the *Birds* of Aristophanes (fig. 18), the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, and the *Antigone* of Sophocles (fig. 19). So the simple background erected in the Harvard Stadium in 1906 for the performance of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus (fig. 20) met all the requirements of the play. This background consisted in the main of a straight wall, adorned with simple pilasters. In front of the single door was a porch-like structure formed by four columns set a few

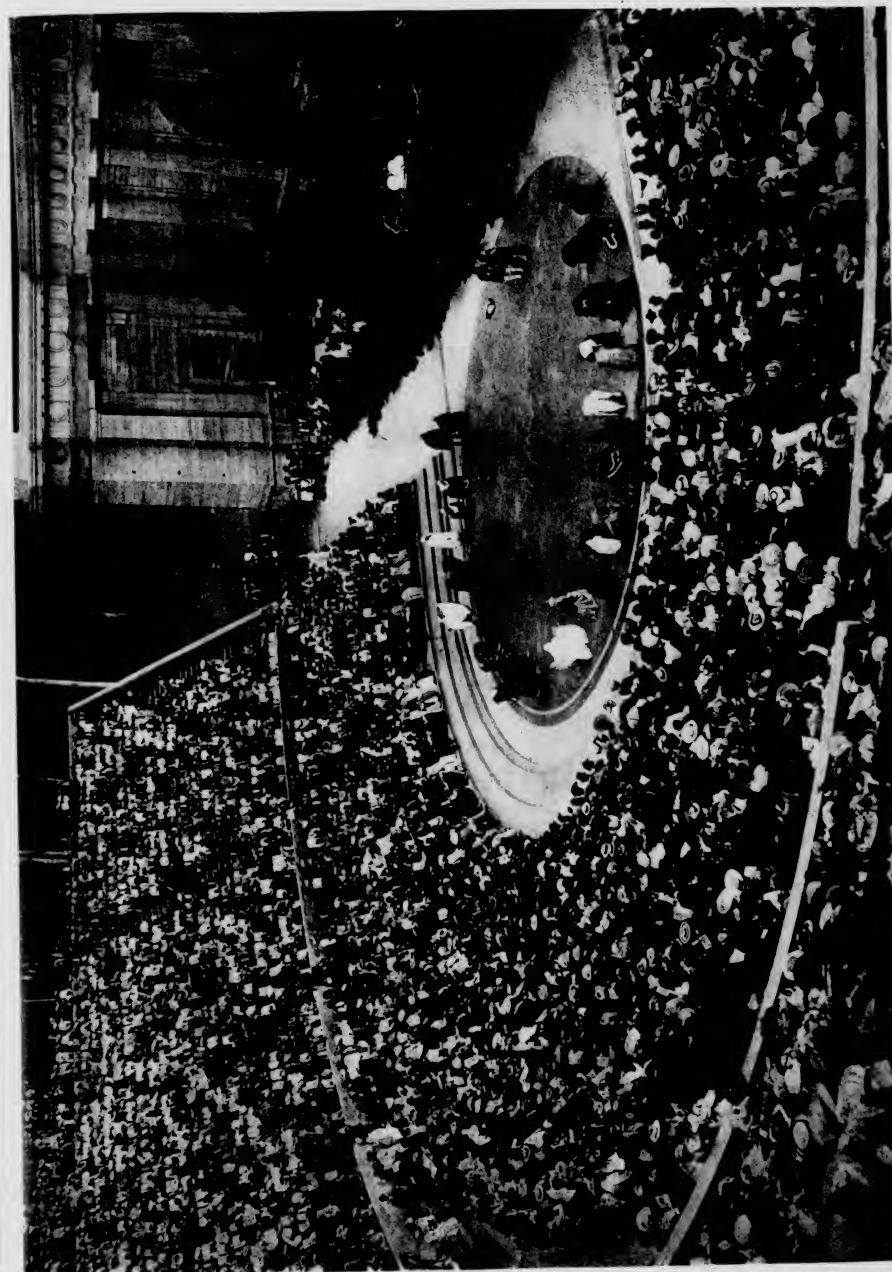


FIG. 18. SCENE FROM THE *BIRDS* OF ARISTOPHANES PERFORMED BY STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT THE DEDICATION OF THE GREEK THEATER, SEPT. 17, 1903.

stage was usually of great size. That of the Large Theater at Pompeii measured 105 feet by 20, that of the Odeum of Herodes Atticus 120 by 24, that of the Theater at Orange 203 by 50. It is interesting to note that the French, for the performances in the Theater at Orange, found it advisable to construct a stage much smaller than that of the ancient theater. Some scholars have seen in the great breadth of the Roman stage an explanation, at least in part, of the running scenes, so common in Plautus, that is, scenes in which slaves are described as running in hot haste across the stage, and yet consuming a long time to cover that space.

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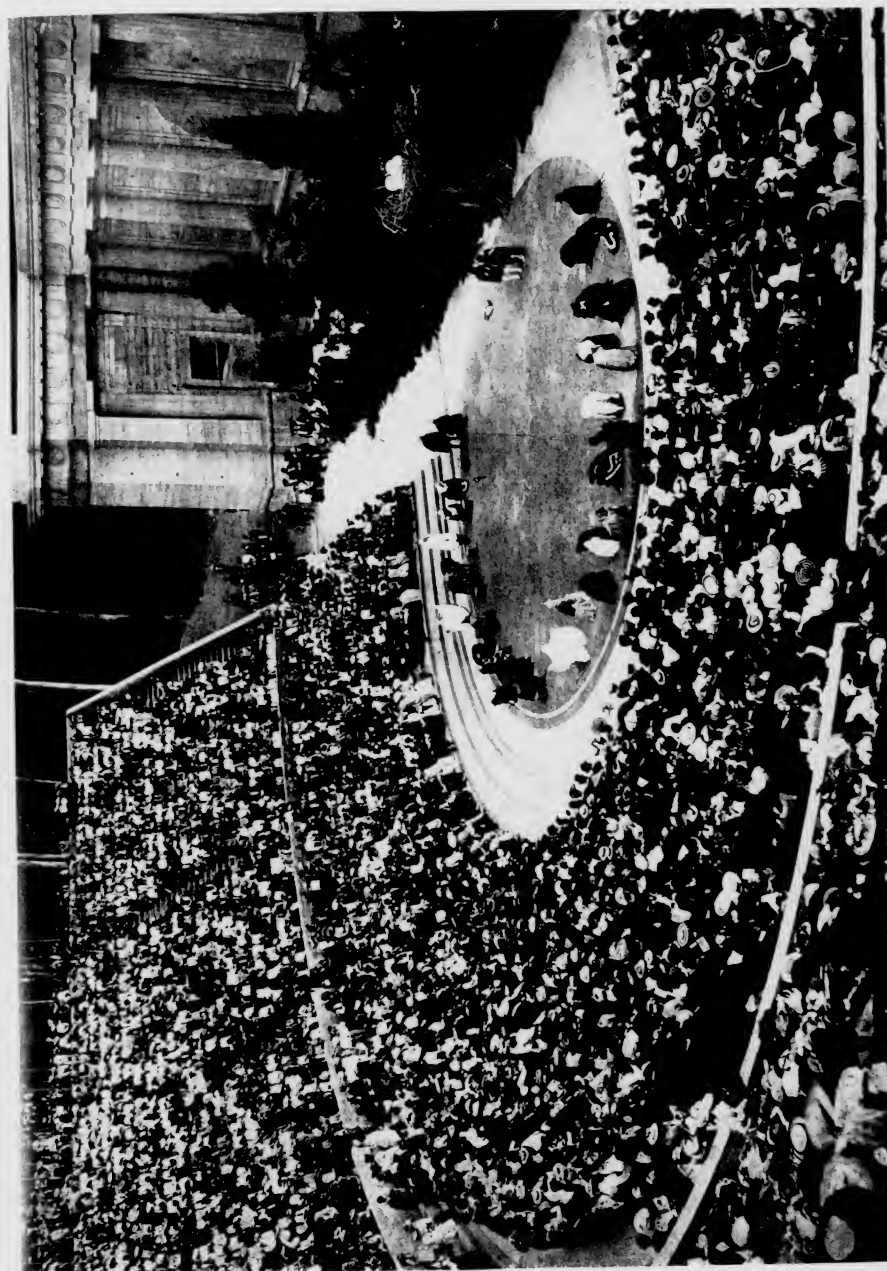


FIG. 18. SCENE FROM THE BIRDS OF ARISTOPHANES PERFORMED BY STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT THE DEDICATION OF THE GREEK THEATER, SEPT. 17, 1903.

feet from the door and carrying a pedimental or gable-like structure. So also the theater at Bradfield College in England (figs. 21, 22) was well adapted to a recent performance of the *Alcestis*. At Rome, it must be remembered, the details of scenery, costume, and the like were wholly Greek. It will be convenient to note here that in the one satyric drama which has come down to us the scene consists of a country region, with the cave of Polyphemos in the center.

In Graeco-Roman comedy the action, in the great majority of the plays, took place on the public street, before one or more private houses.⁷ The *Captivi* of Plautus requires but one house; the *Phormio* of Terence calls for three. In the *Menaechmi* of Plautus, which was acted some years ago, in the original, by the students of Barnard College, two houses are needed. In the Graeco-Roman theater all the events of the play went on in the open; interior scenes were never represented. In the *Antigone* of Sophocles, *Antigone* calls her sister *Ismene* out of the palace, that *alone* *Ismene* may hear the decree of *Creon* with respect to the burial of their brothers. The real reason for *Antigone's* act is that the poet cannot picture the sisters as talking within the palace. In the *Mostellaria* of Plautus *Philematium* completes her toilet on the street; later in the same play there is a drinking-bout on the street. In the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus (597, 609-610) *Palaestrio*, *Pleusicles*, and *Periplocomenus* hold an important secret conference on the street. At right angles to the main street a lane, known as an *angiportum*,

⁷ Throughout the remaining pages of this paper the illustrations will be taken mainly from Roman comedy, partly because of limitations of space, partly because the Romans so strongly preferred comedy to tragedy.

sometimes, if not always, ran back between the houses. By this *angiportum* access was had to the back or garden part of the houses, or to the country (the *rus* that figures so largely in the Roman comedies); by the *angiportum*, again, an actor might leave the stage and return to it by a roundabout route, as *Davus* does so cleverly in Terence, *Andria*, 732-746. The *angiportum*, finally, was a favorite place for eavesdroppers. One and the same scene served for all towns alike. In the *Menaechmi* of Plautus, 72-73, the prologist says, "This city is for the present *Epidamnus*, while this play is on: when another play shall be acted, it will become another town." In the prologue of the *Truculentus* of Plautus the text is sadly corrupt: yet it is clear that the speaker of the prologue is saying that the stage represents Athens "so long as we are acting this play." This implies, it would seem, that the scenic resources of the Roman theater were after all not very elaborate or at least that the scenic artists were not very precise in delineation of landscapes. Compare, too, what is said in the next paragraph about change of scenery.

The scenery consisted of painted boards. If there were three houses in the scene, the house-door was set in each case opposite the door in the *scaena* (see above, page 187). If only one or two houses were required, we may suppose that one or two doors in the *scaena* were kept closed. Changes of scenery were infrequent. No extant Roman play requires such change. In only one extant Greek tragedy, the *Ajax* of Sophocles, is a change of scenery necessary, from a modern point of view. Part of the action is laid before the tent of *Ajax* in the midst of the Greek host before Troy, part (the suicide of *Ajax*) on a lonely stretch of shore.



FIG. 19. STAGE OF GREEK THEATER AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA. STAGE SETTING FOR RECENT PERFORMANCE OF SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* BY MARGARET ANGLIN.

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Yet, when this play was produced in New York City some years ago by resident Greeks, no attempt was made to change the scene. Ajax slew himself in one corner of the extremely small stage, a short distance only from the place where all the preceding action of the play had gone on. The audience, however, felt no difficulty. The unfamiliarity of a modern audience with Greek and Latin of course forces the audience to strain its attention on what is actually happening on the stage, and leaves it little or no time for criticism of such matters as the failure to change the setting in the Ajax. So far as I know, there were no complaints when, at the performance of the Phormio at Harvard in 1894 there was no real *angiportum*, though one is demanded by the play; the painter, by a skilful use of perspective, had created the illusion of such an *angiportum*, a copy of the Street of the Hanging Balcony at Pompeii. The eavesdropper merely stood before this painted street: yet no one, so far as I know, complained. The ancient audience, on the other hand, demanded far less in the way of illusion than we moderns have learned to expect; a true comparison, in this regard, lies between such an audience and the audience of Shakespeare's time, not between us and the ancient Greek or Roman audience.

That changes of scenery did occur, however, is shown by the fact that Vitruvius describes the devices used to effect such change. The painted boards in front of the *scaena* were so arranged that they might be drawn asunder and shoved out of the way. Such scenery was called *scaena ductilis*, "a drawable scene," "movable scenery." When several plays, laid in different places, were to be given in succession on one day, it would be a simple matter to set them all before the

performances of the day began, and then, at the proper moment, to withdraw the front scene and display the scene behind, previously all set up. On the sides of the stage, connected in some way with the scenery at the back, were arrangements called by the Greeks *περίακτοι*, by the Romans *scaenae versiles*, "revolvers." These were large triangular prisms revolving on a socket or base, after the fashion of a modern revolving bookcase. Upon the three faces of the prism were painted different pictures, arranged, however, so that the particular face which for the moment was turned toward the spectators matched the back scene. To both kinds of *scaenae* or scenery Vergil alludes, in *Georgics* 3.24, the passage referred to above (page 145). If a partial change of scene was desired, it might be effected by turning the prisms; a complete change could be made by simultaneously turning the prisms and removing the back scene. Before the play began the scenery was hidden by a curtain; as set forth above (page 145), this was lowered when the play began, raised when the play was over.

There were arrangements also by which personages—e.g., gods—might appear in mid-air, or might come up from the nether world. The arrival of gods was accompanied by stage-thunder; a striking instance is to be found in the *Amphitruo* of Plautus, 1053 ff.

From various passages in the plays of Plautus and Terence and from ancient vases we get hints of the costume and make-up of actors. Professional costumed, known as *choregi* or *choragi*, supplied everything needed for the equipment of actors. The *senex* or old man is regularly white-haired; one is described as knock-kneed, large-paunched, fat-cheeked, short, with black eyes, and

long jaws, and rather flat-footed; another is white-haired and white-bearded; most, if not all, old men in the plays carried a staff or cane, with a crook handle. Philocrates, a young man in the *Captivi* of Plautus, is thin-faced, sharp-nosed, pale, black-eyed, with hair in curls and ringlets. The young men regularly had dark hair,

setting forth from home to meet a slave from another household, and fearing that this other may pass him on the way, calls to those within his house, "If any red-head comes looking for me . . ." The other, who has just arrived, overhears him and cries, "There, there, that will do: he's here!" Red hair,

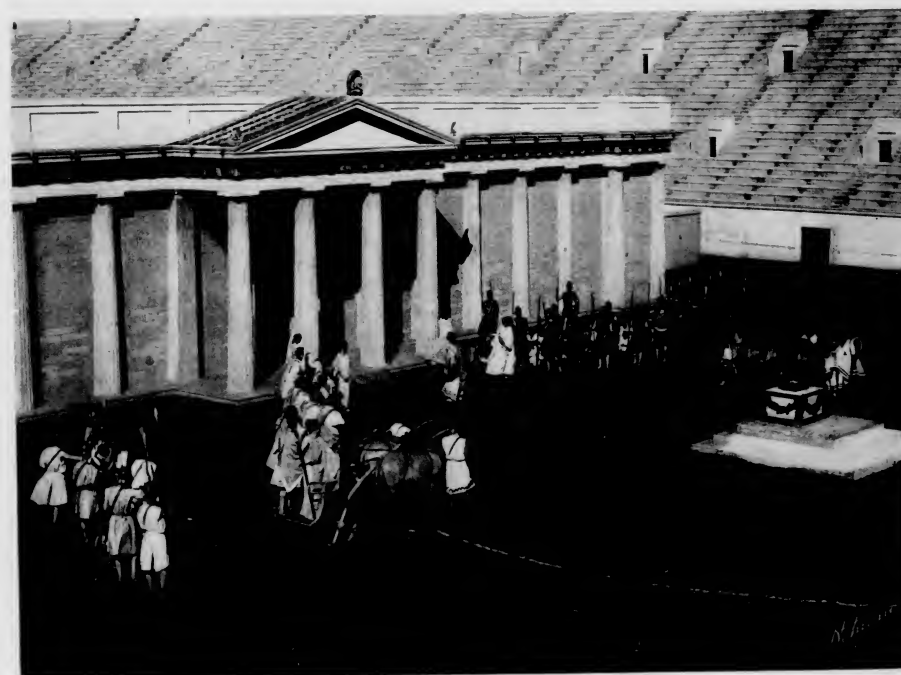


FIG. 20. PERFORMANCE OF AESCHYLUS' AGAMEMNON IN THE HARVARD STADIUM AT CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

and plenty of it. In the *Pseudolus* of Plautus the slave Pseudolus is red-headed, with a paunch, thick-ankled, swarthy, large-headed, sharp-eyed, red-faced, and with huge feet. The huge feet are, however, an abnormal feature, for by them, rather than by the rest of the description, Pseudolus is instantly identified. In the *Phormio* of Terence the slave Geta,

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Come to us garbed as a skipper. Wear a sea-hued broadbrim, and a sea-hued cloak. Have this cloak fastened on your

shoulder, so as to leave the arm bare. Pretend to be a sailor. You can get your make-up at the house of our old friend here: he has fishermen slaves.

The traveller coming from foreign parts wore a *petasus*, or broadbrimmed hat; sometimes this hung down his back. In the Trinumus of Plautus the trickster wears an extraordinarily wide *petasus*. Charmides, who is watching him, cries, "By Jove, yon fellow is of the mushroom brood: he hides every inch of him with his head." A character common in the plays is the *miles* or *miles gloriosus*, the braggart captain who boasts forever of his (imaginary) exploits as soldier. He wears a *chlamys* (a kind of Greek cloak), a *petasus*, and a sword.

Most of the plays are laid in Athens. A non-Athenian costume is recognizable at sight. In the Poenulus of Plautus, Hanno, a Carthaginian, appears (this play is not laid at Athens, but at Calydon in Aetolia). His costume is recognized at once as Punic by Milphio, the slave, and his master Agorastocles. Hanno evidently wears no *pallium*, or cloak; his long tunic has long hanging sleeves. One of the characters says Hanno is garbed as a woman. In a word, the comments on Hanno's costume are such as, in a certain type of modern comedy or farce, we should hear on the costume of a Chinaman.

In the later days of the Roman theater the most characteristic feature of the actor's make-up was the *persona*, or mask, fashioned of terra-cotta. In the best days of the Roman drama, however, the days of Plautus and Terence, masks were not used. Grease paints, wigs, etc., then sufficed. The masks, when adopted, about 115 B.C., were the conventional masks of the Greek stage. For each important personage in tragedy a mask was evolved; it is said that actors studied

the lines of the traditional mask as closely as they did the lines of the play itself. For comedy, 44 types of mask were developed, 9 for old men, 11 for young men, 7 for slaves, 3 for old women, and 14 for young women. As an actor came on the stage the audience could tell at once, by costume and mask, especially the latter, what rôle he was to play. All this, grotesque as it may seem at first to us, was, in the absence of programmes, helpful to the ancient spectator.

Some details concerning masks may be given. Miserly old men had close-clipped hair; soldiers wore huge manes. A dark, sunburned complexion was sign of rugged health, and so was given to soldiers and country youth. A white complexion showed effeminacy; a pallid (i.e. sallow or yellow) complexion gave evidence of ill health or showed that the wearer was suffering from the ravages of love. The eyebrows were strongly marked and characteristic. When drawn up they denoted pride, impudence, or wrath. The old father, at one time ablaze with wrath, at another brimful of affection, had one eyebrow drawn up, to denote wrath, the other in its natural position; and he kept that side of his face to the spectators which had the eyebrow in keeping with his temper of the moment. Old men and parasites had hook noses; country youths had snub noses.

In the days of Plautus and Terence plays were not divided into acts; they were acted through without pause. Once only in our extant plays is there reference to a break in the acting made by music. In Pseudolus 573-573 A, at the close of what we shall call an act, Pseudolus says: "I will go forth; meanwhile the flute-player will be here and will minister to your pleasure." Pseudolus appears presently at 574, to open the very next scene.

For music in Roman plays we have, however, quite apart from this single reference in the extant plays, plenty of evidence. The evidence finds its most interesting form in the representations which have come down to us, from Roman days, of actual scenes in comedies. These show the musician (regularly there is but one musician, a woman) playing the double *tibiae*, an instrument resembling the flute. The flute-player appeared on the stage with the actors. When the Phormio of Terence was produced at Harvard in 1894, sometimes one, sometimes two flute-players appeared on the stage with the actors. At the performance of the Agamemnon of Aeschylus at Harvard in 1906 (fig. 20) one flute-player appeared with the chorus, in the orchestra. In neither case, however, did the visible musicians play a note: the music was supplied by hidden performers. The musical accompaniment for Roman plays was the work of slaves; the making of music, as author or player, was beneath the dignity of a true Roman.

A few words must be said about the actors. Among the Romans the actor or participant in any spectacle on the stage, especially if he appeared for money, lost all civil rights. Actors, then, were ineligible to hold office. We may recall the instructive story told of Decimus Laberius, the writer of mimes, compelled by Julius Caesar to act in one of his own productions. When Laberius came down from the stage, Caesar gave to him a gold ring and 400,000 sesterces. The 400,000 sesterces were the property qualification necessary to the status of *eques*; the gold ring was worn by the *eques* as outward evidence of his status. By these gifts, then, Caesar was restoring to Laberius the equestrian status he had lost by appearing as actor. With the son of an actor or actress not

even the great-granddaughter of a senator, in the male line, could contract a lawful marriage. Originally magistrates had the right to scourge actors whenever and wherever they saw fit, but Augustus limited this right to the time of the *ludi* and to the theater itself. Yet Augustus exercised a strict supervision over actors; he caused one actor to be beaten with rods through the three theaters, and another, on complaint of a praetor, to be scourged in the atrium of his own house, the general public being admitted to the spectacle. Naturally, in view of what has been said, actors were in general men of inferior station, slaves, or freedmen. Such free-born persons as appeared on the stage were not Romans, but foreigners—Greeks, Asiatics, or Egyptians. Still, distinguished actors sometimes attained a high place in public esteem, even though their political disabilities were not removed. In comedy Q. Roscius Gallus, and in tragedy Claudius Aesopus, contemporaries of Cicero, achieved enviable reputations and amassed great fortunes. In his speech Pro Archia Cicero says:

Who was not deeply moved lately when he heard of the death of Roscius? So perfect was his art, so charming his grace, that one felt he should never have died. By the mere movements of his body he had won from us strong affection.

In Terence's time L. Ambivius Turpio had been famous.

The famous "rule of three actors," which scholars long insisted had governed the distribution of rôles in Greek plays, so that all the rôles of a Greek play, however numerous, were divided, they held, among three actors and only three, had no meaning for the Roman theater.⁸ It has

⁸ Its applicability to the Greek theater, at least that of the best days, has recently been vigorously challenged by an American scholar.

been held that four plays of Plautus require at least four actors; ten plays require five actors; two require six actors. So three plays of Terence require six actors.

One last point may be noted here. In all kinds of Roman dramatic performances, except the mime and the pantomime, all the rôles were taken by men. The Romans themselves vigorously assail

temporary evidence in the second prologue to Terence's *Hecyra*:

And now for my sake give ear to what I am about to ask. I am bringing before you again the *Hecyra*, which I have never been suffered to act in peace and quiet. When first I tried to act this play, I had no chance, for the excitement about some prize-fighters, the noise of parties forming for that show, the confusion and the shrieks



FIG. 21. THE GREEK THEATER OF BRADFELD COLLEGE, BERKSHIRE, ENGLAND.

the immorality of the mime and the pantomime.

It remains to consider the audience. Admission to theatrical performances was free to all classes of the community, except at first to slaves and foreigners. Later, slaves, too were admitted, and of course foreigners; slaves in attendance on their masters cannot long have been excluded. For the presence of women in the theater as early as the time of Terence (that is, before 160 B.C.), we have con-

temporary evidence in the second prologue to Terence's *Hecyra*:
And now for my sake give ear to what I am about to ask. I am bringing before you again the *Hecyra*, which I have never been suffered to act in peace and quiet. When first I tried to act this play, I had no chance, for the excitement about some prize-fighters, the noise of parties forming for that show, the confusion and the shrieks

listen, that he may have the heart to write other plays, and that it may pay me to learn new plays and produce them, at my expense, for your amusement.

The speaker was the famous actor and stage-manager, L. Ambivius Turpio.

The prologue to the *Poenulus* of Plautus is exceptionally good:

Be silent and hearken unto me, and sit ye quietly on the benches—such are the orders of General, General—General what you do think? General Stagemanager—orders meant both for those who came hungry and for those who breakfasted before they came. Those who ate first were by far the wiser; those who came hungry must fill themselves with the plays.⁹ If a man has anything to eat, it's the height of folly to come here on an empty stomach, to listen to us. Arise, Sir Herald, and proclaim silence. I've been waiting to see if you knew your duty. Lift up your voice, exert it well: it is your voice whereby you get your living. If you don't shout out now you'll have a chance to die by and by of silent starvation. Let not the ushers move about before my face or conduct anyone to a seat while an actor is on the stage. Those who slept too long, and so came late, ought either to stand up or to shorten their sleep. Let not slaves block up the way and so cheat freemen out of their places. Women that have nursing babies should look after them at home, and not bring them to the play, lest the nurses themselves get thirsty and the babies die of hunger, or else, through hunger, bleat like kids. Let the women look on in silence, let them laugh quietly, let them keep from droning away in their sing-song voices, let them put off their conversation till they get home, lest they be a plague to men here as well as in their own homes.

Since the whole population was at liberty to come, free of charge, the theaters were constructed to accommodate large throngs. Yet the statements made in ancient writers (and frequently repeated

in modern books) of the vast numbers of seats in ancient structures, theatrical, amphitheatrical, circensian, are much exaggerated. Pliny the Elder declares that the *Theatrum Pompeii* seated 40,000 persons. This Ch. Huelsen, the distinguished German archaeologist, refuses to believe. He calculates that this theater could seat at most 17,500, the *Theatrum Marcelli* 9,000 to 10,000¹⁰. The Large Theater at Pompeii could seat 5,000. Though these figures come far short of Pliny's, they nevertheless prove the enormous size of the ancient Roman theaters.

That the audience was anything but quiet and orderly appears from the prologues to the *Hecyra* and the *Poenulus*, already translated in part (pages 202–203). We find similar appeals in the prologues to many other plays. For a much later date we have Horace's testimony (page 145). The audience was not slow to express its approval or disapproval. Actors and actresses were at times hissed off the stage. Much noise was due, no doubt, to the hired claque; the prologue to the *Amphitruo* of Plautus gives ample evidence of the existence of such a claque.

One source of disorder remains to be noted, the interchange of remarks between actors and spectators. Of this there is space to mention but two examples. In the prologue to the *Captivi* of Plautus, the prologist, after outlining

¹⁰ The basis of his calculations of the seating capacity of the theaters, and of the Coliseum is the number of linear feet of seating-space available. If this number could be calculated exactly (the condition of the ruins unfortunately makes this impossible), it would be easy to get the total of seats by allotting 16 inches to each spectator (see above, page 147). Anyone who has ever been at pains to check up popular or newspaper conceptions of the seating-capacity of modern buildings, ball-grounds, etc., will put no faith in ancient estimates of seating capacity.

⁹ Note the plural here.

been held that four plays of Plautus require at least four actors; ten plays require five actors; two require six actors. So three plays of Terence require six actors.

One last point may be noted here. In all kinds of Roman dramatic performances, except the mime and the pantomime, all the rôles were taken by men. The Romans themselves vigorously assail

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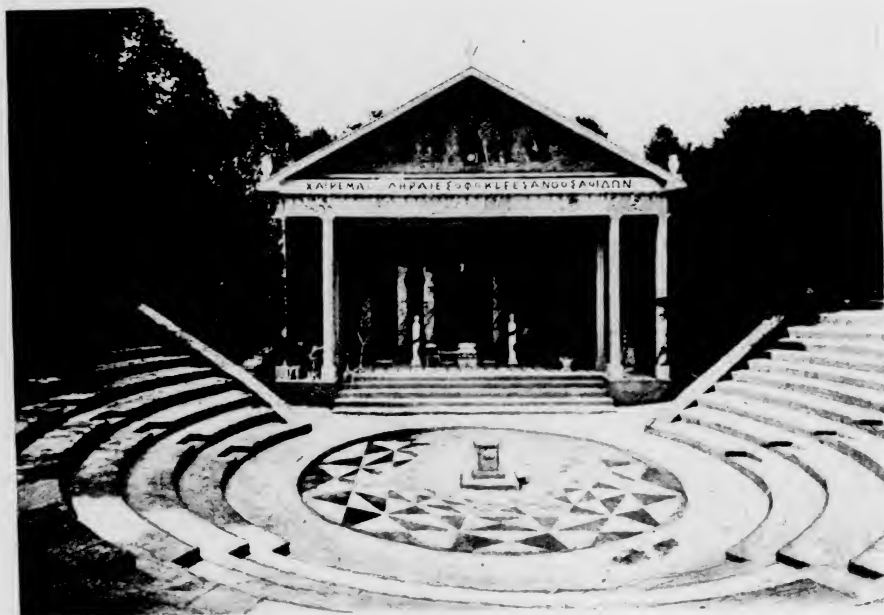


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of the women drove me off before I had half finished. I tried it again. You liked the first part, when suddenly a report ran through the theater that a gladiatorial exhibition was to be given that day. Off flew the spectators, shouting, hustling, fighting to get places at the gladiatorial combat. I had a second time to give way. Now there is no crowd; now there is silence and quiet, no counter-attraction; a chance has been given to me at last to act my part, and to you to honor the author whose play I am seeking to produce. For my sake be silent and

listen, that he may have the heart to write other plays, and that it may pay me to learn new plays and produce them, at my expense, for your amusement.

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the somewhat intricate plot of the play, says to the spectators, "Have I said enough? Do you understand the plot?" They answer in the affirmative, all save one, for the prologist exclaims, "By Jove, there's a man in the back who says *No*. My good sir, come nearer. If you can't find room to sit down, you can

What? I know nothing, I see nothing, I go blindly, I cannot tell whither to go or where I am or who I am. I pray you, spectators kind, help me, help me, and show me the man who stole it. (Follows a voice from the audience:) What's that you say, sir? I'm resolved to trust *you*; I know by *your* face that *you* are an honest man. What's that you say? (Then to the other spectators.) What's the matter?

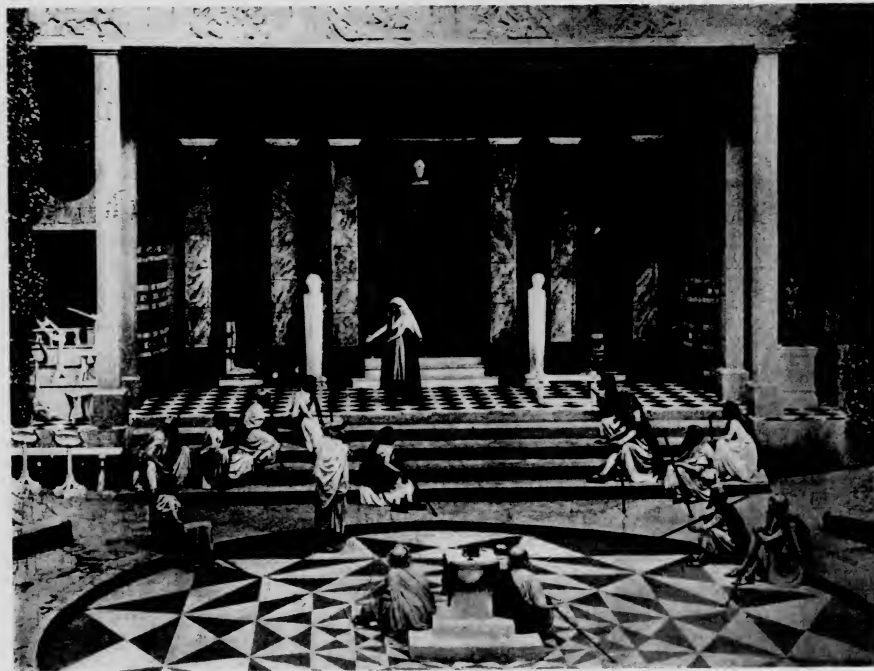


FIG. 22. SCENE FROM THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES, AS GIVEN IN THE GREEK THEATER OF BRADFELD COLLEGE, BERKSHIRE.

find room to *walk*" (there is a play on words here: *walk* is meant to suggest "walk out of the theater"). In the *Aulularia* of Plautus the miser, who has just lost the pot of gold he had been jealously guarding, rushing on the stage in wild excitement, cries:

I'm dead, I'm killed, I'm slain! Whither shall I run? Hold! Hold! Whom?

What are *you* laughing at? I know *you*: I know there's many a thief here, many a wolf in sheep's clothing. (Then to the one honest man:) What, what? None of these spectators has it? You've killed me. Tell me, who has it, who has it? You don't know? Ah me, poor luckless wight, I'm slain, I'm killed, I'm dead!

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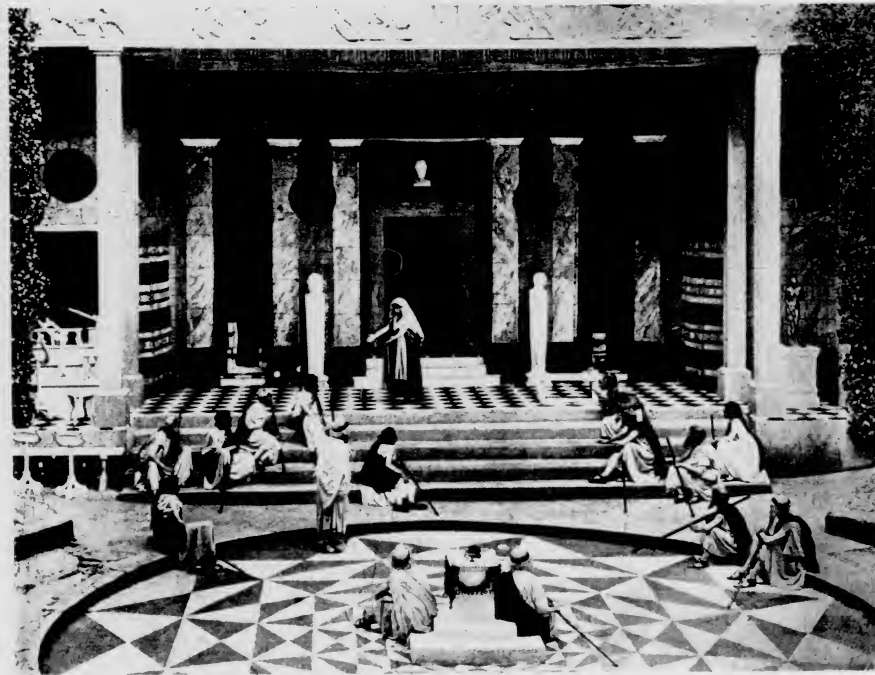


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